

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY PREACH THE MINOR PROPHETS TO A TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY WORLD USING AMOS
AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Preaching from the prophetic genre is largely underrepresented in today's sermons in our evangelical churches.

A premise of this Thesis-Project is that the current lack of easy accessibility to resources combined with the challenges of the prophetic genre, contributes to a dearth of preaching from the Minor Prophets. This project therefore addresses whether an introductory training resource for preaching the Minor Prophets that emphasizes the distinctive elements of the prophetic genre will better enable preachers to preach expositional sermons from the Minor prophetic books.

The project includes a four-part seminar designed for people possessing an introductory course in homiletics. The seminar, using Amos as a case-study, addresses four major areas the preacher needs to be sensitive to when preaching from any of the Minor Prophets. These subject areas include: 1) the historical and cultural background of the book and the prophet 2) the spiritual issues the prophet addressed 3) sensitivity to the key elements of prophetic genre and finally 4) the exegetical and hermeneutical process involved in demonstrating the relevancy of ancient texts for today.

A manuscript of a sermon by the author and a summary of the key steps involved in constructing a sermon from the Minor Prophets is included as an example of "How to effectively preach expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets for a twenty-first century audience."

A summary of the evaluation results highlights that as a result of attending the seminar, participants confirmed that they now possessed greater confidence and an increased likelihood to preach from the Minor prophetic books.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Walter Kaiser Jr. said that the Old Testament is clearly "overlooked and frequently neglected in the preaching and teaching ministry of the church."¹ If this is true of the Old Testament as a whole, then it is also true of those books that are part of the prophetic genre. Even though the volume of words that comprise the prophetic genre is almost equal to the entire New Testament, this part of the Bible is largely underrepresented from today's sermons in our evangelical churches.²

Ignoring or giving only limited attention to the preaching of the prophets presents challenges for the church. It presents a challenge for the preacher, who is enjoined to preach the whole counsel of God as a means of equipping and maturing God's people.³ For local congregations it means that important revelation from God found in this part of the Bible is underrepresented. Consequently, their understanding of God's character, His purposes for the world and the church is underrepresented.

A variety of reasons can be posited for why this portion of the Bible is ignored in our preaching today. There is the perceived notion that the Old Testament is highly irrelevant for living today.⁴ Since this perception is true of the Old Testament as a whole, it also remains true for the collection of books known as the prophets.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 15.

² Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church*, 118; Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Preaching the Prophets with Honor," *Leadership* 18 (Fall 1997): 57.

³ Acts 20; 1Tim 3:16; Eph. 4:11-14. All Scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version, 2004 unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1999), 22-23. See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Exegetical Theology* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 1981), 37.

While the perceived lack of relevance for today's audience may be the overarching reason accounting for the lack of attention the Old Testament prophets receive today, there are other possible contributing factors. One of these key factors is the lack of available resources designed to assist the preacher in the task of preaching from the prophetic books. There are numerous books and articles that address narrative preaching, preaching the parables, preaching epistle but there is a scarcity of materials that focus on how to preach from the prophetic books.

A second factor relates to the challenge of dealing with the prophetic genre. In order to effectively preach from the Minor prophetic books, the preacher needs to understand the distinctive elements that comprise the prophetic genre. This reality demands that the preacher understands the basic elements of prophetic speech whether it be judgment or salvation messages. In addition, there are a number of other literary forms employed by the prophets that the preacher needs to be aware of in order to correctly understand the written message. These additional literary forms include such features as woe oracles, dirges, covenant lawsuits as well as oracles against the nations.

The Means Used To Address The Problem

This project addressed whether an introductory training resource for preaching the Minor Prophets that emphasized the distinctive elements of the prophetic genre would better enable preachers to preach expositional sermons from the Minor prophetic books. A premise of this project was that the current paucity of available resources, combined with the challenges of the prophetic genre, contributes to a dearth of preaching from the Minor Prophets.

The training resource designed for this Thesis-Project consists of a series of teaching seminars on preaching the Minor Prophets using the book of Amos as a case study. The teaching sessions are suitable as conference seminars for current or future preachers including laypersons who have completed an introductory course in homiletics. The teaching material could also be taught in a Bible College or Seminary as part of a homiletics course devoted to preaching genre sensitive sermons.

The seminar consists of four sessions. The first session deals with the historical and cultural context of both Israel and the broader Ancient Near East that confronted the prophet. The prophets frequently draw on the history of past events in order to communicate their message. Also, many of the Minor Prophets' ministry focused on the threat posed by other Ancient Near East nations such as Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, etc. These historical realities need to be unearthed in order for today's preacher to faithfully capture and communicate the prophet's message.

Session two focuses on the specific spiritual issues confronting God's people in the book of Amos. Amos focuses on the sins of social injustice, materialism, hypocritical worship and general covenant unfaithfulness. The prophet warns that unless Israel repents from such spiritual misconduct impending judgment awaits and often God's instrument of judgment was one of those Ancient Near East nations.

Session three focuses on the Bible as literature comprised of a variety of genres with attention given to the key elements of prophetic genre.

Session four addresses the exegetical and hermeneutical process involved in demonstrating the relevancy of ancient texts for today. Some matters that the prophet addressed are no longer relevant or even exist today and, conversely, while some of our

most pressing issues are not directly addressed, principles taught by these ancient prophets address how we respond with our issues. So how do we as preachers today take what the prophet said to his audience and make it relevant to what we say to our audience? Finally, the manuscript of a sermon by the presenter and a summary of the key steps involved in constructing a sermon from the Minor Prophets is included as an example of "How to effectively preach expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets for a twenty-first century audience."

In order to determine if the seminar sessions were helpful a survey questionnaire was administered to the participants. This questionnaire focused on key concepts related to prophetic genre and was completed both before the seminar sessions and upon completion of the seminar. The before and after results were compared to determine if there was an increased understanding in some of the key concepts of prophetic genre and its implications for preaching from the Minor Prophets. In addition, an objective questionnaire was completed by the participants which was designed to assess the effectiveness of the seminar and whether they now sensed a greater confidence in preaching expositional sermons from this part of the Bible.

Organization Of Chapters Two Through Five

Chapter 2 provides a summary biblical exegesis of Amos in order to give the reader a clear understanding of the message of this book which will be used as a case study.

Chapter 3 includes a general discussion of literary genre and the key features of prophetic genre in particular. This chapter also includes a broader discussion of the prophetic office and the ministry of the prophets. Old Testament introductions and

commentaries were used to summarize each of the Minor Prophets, their historical context and the key issues they confronted.

Chapter 4 consists of four seminar sessions designed for teaching current and future preachers, who have taken an introductory course in homiletics, on how to effectively prepare expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets for a twenty-first century audience.

Chapter 5 provides a report on my teaching of the seminar. A summary of the evaluations of the seminar by the participants as well as my response to the participant evaluations is included. Observations relating to what elements of the seminar presentations were helpful as well as considerations for how the sessions could be improved are also included.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

This chapter will engage in biblical and theological reflection on the issues involved in using the book of Amos as a case study in how to effectively preach the Minor Prophets to a twenty-first century world. The focus of the chapter will be an exegesis of select passages of Amos in order to give the reader a clear understanding of the book. The context of Amos' ministry will be established and an outline of the book will precede the exegesis.

Establishing The Ministry Context Of Amos The Prophet

To fully grasp the message of the prophets the preacher needs to be sensitive to the broader context of the prophet's ministry including the historical, political, economic and religious context.

The Political And Historical Context Of Amos

Amos is an eighth century prophet whose ministry occurred during the reign of king Uzziah of the southern kingdom of Judah and king Jeroboam of the northern kingdom of Israel.¹ When the kingdom of Israel divided following the death of Solomon in 930 B.C. resulting in the northern and southern kingdom, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who is often called Jeroboam I, ruled over the north.² The "Jeroboam" who is ruling during Amos' ministry is to be distinguished from Jeroboam I and is commonly referred to as Jeroboam II.³

¹ Amos 1:1.

² 1 Kings 11-12.

³ Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos Micah*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 205-206.

Jeroboam II reigned for forty years from 793-753 B.C. and during his reign Israel experienced economic prosperity and political stability including a geographic expansion of the kingdom.⁴ Prior to the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel was dominated by Syria as confirmed by the following passages. 2 Kings 10:32 reads, "In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the Valley of the Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan." 2 Kings 13:3,7 affirms,

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael ... For there was not left to Jehoahaz an army of more than fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing.

In response to King Jehoahaz' prayer God granted deliverance to Israel as confirmed by 2 Kings 13:4-5, "Then Jehoahaz sought the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them. Therefore the LORD gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly."

History confirms that Israel's "saviour" was the Assyrians as Adad-Nirari III defeated Damascus in 802 B.C. and placed Ben-Hadad II, Aram's ruler, under a heavy tax.⁵ For the next forty years Israel and Judah enjoyed a period of non-interference by the nation of Assyria. Syria had been subdued by Assyria, Egypt was not a threat at this

⁴ Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 107; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 351.

⁵ Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 25.

time and the Assyrians devoted their attention to greater threats which confronted them from the north. The result was that Israel and Judah were left alone.⁶

During this period of time the northern kingdom of Israel experienced geographical expansion and economic prosperity.⁷ Jehoash became king of Israel in 801 B.C. following the defeat of Damascus by the Assyrians in 802 B.C. Subsequently, he recovered the cities that Israel had lost to Syria during the reign of king Hazael. In addition, Jehoash defeated Amaziah king of Judah.⁸ The combination of these developments prepared the way for a peaceful coexistence between Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash and king Uzziah, the son of Amaziah who became king of Judah.⁹ These factors resulted in the subsequent years being politically and economically prosperous for both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel.¹⁰

The political stability and economic prosperity provided a challenge for the ministry of Amos. A sense of complacency and self-sufficiency made it difficult for Israel to take Amos' message seriously. When Amos announced that Israel would go into captivity the weakened condition of Syria and Assyria made this scenario seem unlikely, hence Israel perceived no reason to be disturbed by the prophet's warning.¹¹ Also, their economic prosperity was understood as an indication of God's pleasure, therefore, the

⁶ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 25.

⁷ Cf. 2 Kings 13:22-25.

⁸ 2 Kings 14:1-14.

⁹ Cf. 2 Kings 14:21-25; 2 Chronicles 26:1-15 and the summary by Smith and Page, 25.

¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 26:1-15 affirms the positive developments for Judah under the leadership of king Uzziah and 2 Kings 14 details the geographical expansion of Israel under king Jeroboam II. See the summary provided by Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, ed. Se. Dean McBride, Jr., trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 89.

¹¹ Amos 5:27; 6:7; 7:17.

idea that Israel was going to be the recipient of God's severe judgment did not resonate.¹²

The Economic Context In Israel

The political stability characterizing Jeroboam II's reign directly impacted Israel's economic prosperity. The geographical expansion of the kingdom resulted in Israel receiving tribute from enemies they defeated which resulted in new wealth for many people in the kingdom. Increased wealth resulted in an elaborate, luxurious lifestyle for many.¹³ However, not everyone in Israel was rich. There were the poor and the vulnerable and Amos had much to say about the relationship between the wealthy and the disadvantaged and the social injustice that inflicted increased pain on the poor. The desire of the people to achieve greater wealth even if it meant violating God's Law and treating others unjustly exposed their sin of greed and materialism.¹⁴ Amos addressed these sins as he warned of God's impending judgment.

The Religious Context In Israel

The people of Israel at the time of Amos' ministry were engaged in syncretistic worship as they engaged in both the worship of Baal and Yahweh. Amos denounced the people's sin of idolatry promising God's judgment ultimately resulting in captivity.¹⁵ Israel modeled a mechanistic view of God as they offered sacrifices out of obligation instead of devotion, which resulted in hypocritical worship. A disconnect between their worship and their conduct was clearly evidenced as they engaged in acts of worship while simultaneously practicing covenant unfaithfulness.¹⁶

¹² e.g. Amos 2:13-16.

¹³ Amos 3:15; 5:11; 6:1-14; 8:4-6.

¹⁴ Amos 2:8; 5:11-12; 8:4-5.

¹⁵ Amos 5:27.

¹⁶ Amos 4:4-13; 5:21-24.

The corrupt, hypocritical worship characterizing Israel in the days of Amos was the result of seeds planted earlier in their history. Following the death of Solomon in 930 B.C. the kingdom of Israel divided. Jeroboam son of Nebat, i.e. Jeroboam I, became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel.¹⁷ In order to maintain control over his kingdom and the allegiance of his people he established new worship centers in the kingdom, one in the northern part at Dan and one in the southern part at Bethel. If the people of Israel were dependent upon the temple in the southern kingdom of Judah for the most important part of their lives, i.e. the worship of Jehovah, then there would be little possibility of Jeroboam keeping his people united. As a result, a separate worship system was established. This false worship system not only included alternate worship centers but entailed the appointment of non-Levitical priests to serve in the temple and the institution of new feasts to replace the ones being celebrated in Solomon's temple at Jerusalem.¹⁸

Subsequently, during the reign of king Ahab, he and queen Jezebel built a temple in the capital city of Samaria dedicated to the worship of Baal.¹⁹ In the years that followed, prophets of God were killed and the prophets of Baal and Asherah were embraced by both the common people and the kings.²⁰ While not everyone accepted this false worship as evidenced with the prophet Elijah and king Jehu, overall this syncretistic worship became the norm in Israel and was flourishing in the days of Amos.²¹

¹⁷ 1 Kings 11-12.

¹⁸ 1 Kings 12.

¹⁹ 1 Kings 16:29-34.

²⁰ 1 Kings 18:13-19.

²¹ 1 Kings 19:18; 2 Kings 10:18-29.

An Outline Of The Book Of Amos

The book of Amos is carefully structured as evidenced in the following outline.

- I. Introduction 1:1-2**
 - A. The Superscription of Amos 1:1
 - B. The Theme of Amos 1:2
- II. Eight Oracles of Judgment: The Strategy of Amos' Ministry 1:3-2:16**
 - A. An Oracle of Judgment Against Damascus 1:3-5
 - B. An Oracle of Judgment Against Gaza 1:6-8
 - C. An Oracle of Judgment Against Tyre 1:9-10
 - D. An Oracle of Judgment Against Edom 1:11-12
 - E. An Oracle of Judgment Against Ammon 1:13-15
 - F. An Oracle of Judgment Against Moab 2:1-3
 - G. An Oracle of Judgment Against Judah 2:4-5
 - H. An Oracle of Judgment Against Israel 2:6-16
- III. Five Messages of Judgment Against Israel 3:1-6:14**
 - A. A Sermon Announcing Israel's Destruction 3:1-15
 - B. A Sermon Announcing Israel's Sinfulness 4:1-13
 - C. A Sermon Announcing Israel's Funeral 5:1-17
 - D. A Pronouncement of Woe Because of Israel's Hypocritical Worship 5:18-27
 - E. A Pronouncement of Woe Because of Israel's Materialistic Greed and False Sense of Security 6:1-14
- IV. Five Visions of Judgment Against Israel and Amos' Exchange with Amaziah the Priest 7:1-9:10**
 - A. The Vision of Locusts 7:1-3
 - B. The Vision of Fire 7:4-6
 - C. The Vision of the Plumb Line or The Vision of Tin 7:7-9
 - D. The Encounter (Amos's Confrontation with Amaziah the Priest at Bethel) 7:10-17
 - E. The Vision of the Summer Fruit 8:1-14
 - F. The Vision Depicting Judgment at the Worship Center 9:1-10
- V. A Better Day Is Coming: The Promise of Restoration and Blessing 9:11-15**

The above outline is reflective of some key textual indicators found within the book that highlight its internal structure.²² Chapters one and two are notable for the

²² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 103-104. The above outline takes into account Kaiser's comments but does not follow his breakdown precisely.

repeated use of the phrase "for three transgressions ... and for four." This phrase occurs eight times in the eight messages directed against eight different nations and its employment identifies a distinct unit of thought. Some people see a division between the judgment speeches against the nations in 1:3-2:3 and those directed against God's covenant people in 2:4-16. This division is acceptable however, if one sees Amos in these messages building towards a climactic proclamation against the nation of Israel then it is best for the outline to reflect a single grouping.

The next major section in chapters 3-5 is distinguished as a literary unit by its use of the phrase "hear this word" which occurs in 3:1; 4:1; and 5:1 and the pronouncement of "woe" in 5:18 and 6:1 resulting in five messages of judgment against Israel.

The next major unit extending from 7:1-9:10 includes five visions depicting judgment against the kingdom of Israel. Three times the phrase "this is what the LORD GOD showed me" occurs (7:1, 4; 8:1) while the third vision is introduced with the words "this is what He showed me" (7:7). The final vision begins with Amos stating "I saw the LORD" (9:1). The flow of the five visions is interrupted with an exchange between Amos and Amaziah the priest of Bethel in 7:10-17; an exchange which highlights the resistance of God's people to the word of the Lord, which illustrates why judgment from God must visit His people.

The final feature of restoration and blessing reflects the overarching major division characterizing each of the prophetic books, namely judgment and restoration.

A Summary Exegesis Of The Book Of Amos

A summary exegesis of the book of Amos is included in the following pages in order to give the reader a clear understanding of the message of the book of Amos.

The Introduction 1:1-2

The opening two verses of the book introduce the prophet and provide the context of his ministry in the superscription of 1:1 while the nature of his message is depicted in the theme set forth in 1:2.

The Superscription Of Amos

Amos the prophet is introduced in the book with the opening phrase "The words of Amos" (1:1a). Generally, the prophetic books begin with an emphasis on the word or message which came to the prophets from God as seen in Hosea 1:1; Micah 1:1; Ezekiel 1:3; Joel 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1.²³ To offset the idea that the content of the book of Amos was merely the words of the prophet, is the phrase "which he saw." The word "saw" is a term for the revelation that was given to prophets and it emphasized the divine source of their message. Such authentic revelation from God was one of the key features that qualified one who would be a spokesman for God.²⁴ The term refers not only to the prophetic visions which Amos saw but it also includes all of the words of the prophet. The fact that the words which Amos spoke were divinely sourced implied that the people needed to take them seriously.

Vocationally, Amos is described as one who was "among the shepherds." The word for shepherd refers to "one who manages shepherds."²⁵ The word used here for shepherd is found in other non-biblical texts referring to one who is over a group of shepherds.²⁶ The only other biblical occurrence of this word is found in 2 Kings 3:4

²³ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos Micah*, 230.

²⁴ Isaiah 1:1; Micah 1:1; Deuteronomy 18:18-20; cf. also Billy Smith and Page, 25.

²⁵ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 209.

²⁶ Shalom M. Paul, *Amos* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 34. cf. also Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 230.

where it is translated "sheep breeder." It is used with reference to Mesha, king of Moab, who provided the king of Israel, a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams, which underscores the magnitude of the enterprise associated with one who was a sheep breeder.

Amos 7:14 also needs to be reviewed when considering the vocation of Amos where he is described as being a "herdsman" and a "dresser of sycamore figs." Herdsman could possibly be equated today to a cattleman or a rancher. Also, sycamore figs did not grow in the heights of Tekoa but rather in the lower regions of the Shephelah to the west and in the Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea.²⁷

The combination of these various terms, shepherd, herdsman and grower of sycamore figs affirms that Amos was not some poor farmer trying to carve out a living but rather a successful entrepreneur with smart business acumen.

Amos was from Tekoa; a village located in the southern kingdom of Judah approximately ten miles south of Jerusalem. While he is from the south, his message from God concerned Israel, the northern kingdom.

Typically, prophets dated their ministries by the reign of kings and/or by referencing historical events. Both means are utilized in the introduction of Amos. Amos prophesied during the reign of king Uzziah who reigned in Judah from 783-742 B.C. and king Jeroboam II who ruled in Israel from 786-746 B.C. Placing Amos' ministry during the reign of these two kings means that he prophesied between 783 B.C. and 742 B.C.

²⁷ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 209.

The historical event referenced dates Amos' ministry as "two years before the earthquake." This earthquake "must have been extremely violent and unparalleled" for Amos to employ it as a dating point for his ministry.²⁸ The prophet Zechariah, over two hundred years later, in Zechariah 14:5 mentions the earthquake again. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence for an earthquake at Hazor dating to approximately 760 B.C. which would correspond to a time during Uzziah's reign referenced in the book of Zechariah.²⁹ If this is true, then Amos' ministry can be placed two years before it in 762 B.C.

The Theme Of Amos

Amos 1:2 serves as a topical sentence introducing the whole book.³⁰ It is an announcement of judgment from the Lord that is to fall upon His people due to their covenant unfaithfulness. It is a theme which Amos frequently returns to throughout the book. The verse written in poetic form employs parallelism and two couplets. The first couplet emphasizes the noise and the voice of the One who speaks. The second couplet emphasizes the consequences of his speaking.³¹

The LORD is depicted as roaring from Zion in 1:2. There are two main viewpoints as to how the phrase "The LORD roars" is to be understood. The first viewpoint understands a figure of speech is being employed in which the LORD is likened to a lion that roars after its prey. This figure of speech is used throughout Amos

²⁸ Paul, *Amos*, 35.

²⁹ Paul, *Amos*, 35 and Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 231.

³⁰ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, The Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 330; see also Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 25. There is some discussion whether 1:2 is best understood as a topical sentence to the entire book or whether it introduces the first major oracle (1:3-2:16).

³¹ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 38.

as well as in other prophetic books.³²

A second viewpoint understands the roar to be the roar of a storm.³³ Proponents of this viewpoint understand the verse as a theophany which depicts God as a warrior responding in judgment to the unfaithful actions of His covenant people.³⁴

The impact of the Lord's judgment depicted in His roar, whether it be the roar of a lion or the roar of the storm, is extensive destruction. The consequential impact of His judgment will be that "the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers." From the most fertile places in the land like the top of Carmel to the pasturelands where the shepherds lead their sheep to feed, all will be impacted. Such will be the result of the LORD who roars from Zion. Significantly, this One does not roar from the false worship centers of Bethel or Dan, but from the temple of Jerusalem where God dwells in the midst of His people.³⁵ He is the One who is sovereign.

Eight Oracles Of Judgment: The Strategy Of Amos' Ministry 1:3-2:16

Summary Statement For 1:3-2:16

Through a series of eight oracles of judgment utilizing special stylistic features Amos sets Israel up for a surprising announcement of judgment. He commences with judgments against Israel's enemies and concludes with a climactic, final judgment on the northern kingdom. He demonstrates that Israel is guiltier than the other nations since greater privilege brings greater responsibility.

³² Hosea 11:10; Joel 3:16; Jeremiah 25:30.

³³ Job 37:4 uses a roar in reference to a storm and from Psalm 29:3-9 one learns that the Lord's voice can "thunder."

³⁴ A theophany refers to "a manifestation of the Deity and the resultant catastrophic effects upon the cosmos and nature." See Paul, *Amos*, 38.

³⁵ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 177.

Distinctive Elements Of Amos' Oracles Of Judgment Against The Nations

Judgment speeches against nations were frequently employed by the prophets as seen in Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51, Ezekiel 25-32, Nahum and Obadiah. In order to more fully understand these messages of judgment in Amos, there are some key factors of which the reader needs to be aware.

First, God is presented as Sovereign not only over Israel and Judah but also over all the nations, as He holds all peoples accountable. Reasons for why God's judgment will come against the nations is sometimes due to their treatment of God's covenant people but frequently it is because of the violent crimes they perpetrated against their fellow man.³⁶

Second, Amos employed the feature of entrapment in delivering his message of judgment against Israel. The introduction of 1:1-2, establishes the context of Amos' ministry and underscores major challenges the prophet faced in executing his mission mandate. Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah but with a message for the rivaled northern kingdom of Israel. Secondly, his message of judgment was to be delivered during the reign of Jeroboam II at a time when Israel was enjoying political stability and economic prosperity which they perceived as evidences of God's favor and blessing. Under these circumstances, how would the prophet gain a hearing in order to successfully deliver his message?

³⁶ Jeffrey Niehaus, *Amos*, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary vol. 1, ed. Thomas E., McComiskey (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 340-341. Niehaus postulates that God established a covenant with creation at the beginning and these social crimes against humanity are a violation of the responsibilities associated with that covenant.

Amos overcame these challenges and captured the keen ears of Israel by employing the feature of entrapment; an approach used by communicators to draw in an audience who initially might not be inclined to listen to their message. The speaker delivers his message in such a way that the punch line is not revealed until the listener is already hooked and committed.³⁷ A classic biblical example of entrapment occurred when Nathan the prophet confronted king David over his sin of adultery with Bathsheba.³⁸ Nathan told king David the parable of how a wealthy farmer, who instead of taking a lamb from his own flock to prepare a special dinner, stole from a poor farmer his only lamb which elicited a response of anger from king David. Through this means Nathan drew the king into the story. As king David pronounced judgment upon the wealthy farmer he unwittingly pronounced judgment upon himself.

Similarly, entrapment was employed by Amos in this literary unit. By pronouncing judgment upon Israel's enemies, including the southern kingdom of Judah, the nation of Israel would have been pleased with the prophet's message. According to Amos 5:18, Israel was already looking forward to the Day of the Lord when their enemies would be judged. Therefore, these pronouncements of judgment by Amos aligned with their expectation. However, at their least expecting moment, with their defenses down, Amos delivered his powerful message of judgment against Israel.

Thirdly, and linked closely with the entrapment feature, is the numerical formula employed by Amos in this literary unit. The numerical formula is reflected in the

³⁷ Billy Kangas, "Entrapment: The Biblical Art of Cloak and Dagger Rhetoric," *Patheos Blogs: Hosting the Conversation on Faith*, February 25, 2012, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2012/02/entrapment-the-biblical-art-of-cloak-and-dagger-rhetoric.html>.

³⁸ 2 Samuel 12:1-13.

repeated phrase, "for three transgressions ... and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" found at the beginning of each of the judgment oracles (1:3, 6, 9, 11. 13; 2:1, 4, 6).

There are various numerical formulas found in the Bible but when they are used literally, the number of items included in the list corresponds to the last number of the formula. This feature is seen in the one/two combination in Psalm 62:11-12; the six/seven in Proverbs 6:16-19 and the three/four in Proverbs 30:15b-16.

When Amos employed the three/four formula, his Jewish audience, who would have been familiar with this feature, would have expected Amos to list four things for each of the nations. Careful observation shows that he did not do this. He alternated what was normative and in doing so heightened the tension. One or two sins got highlighted and then he moved on to the next nation thereby creating a sense of suspense. It is a kind of foreshadowing technique highlighting that the focal point of judgment was yet to come. When judgment was pronounced on Judah, Israel probably thought this was the final judgment. However, when four sins were not enumerated, it created a sense of unfinished business. It pointed to another nation; another judgment was yet to come and Israel was that other nation; Israel was that other judgment.³⁹

The Eight Oracles Of Judgment

These oracles of judgment can be arranged in different groupings. Amos begins with foreigners including Damascus (Syria), Gaza (Philistia), Tyre (Phoenicia) and then

³⁹ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. "For Three Sins ... Even for Four: The Numerical Sayings in Amos," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, no. 586 (April 1990): 188-197. Also, Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 379.

he includes distant relatives of Israel, namely, the Edomites, Ammonites and Moabites. Finally, Judah, Israel's brother is addressed, before the concluding message against Israel.

The distinctive characteristics of a judgment oracle are found in each of the speeches including The Messenger Formula ("says the LORD God"), The Statement Accounting for Yahweh's Actions (reasons for judgment) and The Declaration of Yahweh's Action (the judgment).⁴⁰ In the following pages each judgment oracle will be considered with respect to the reason for the judgment, the judgment and the fulfillment of the judgment.

The Oracle Against Damascus (Syria) 1:3-5

The first oracle of judgment is directed against the Syrians of which Damascus is the capital city. The *reason for the judgment* upon Damascus is because of their acts of cruelty committed against God's people (1:3b). The imagery of threshing planks is used to depict their violent crimes. These implements consisted of planks with iron teeth on one side that were used for threshing purposes in order to separate the grain from the stalk.⁴¹ Syria was guilty of gross inhumanities treating people, either literally or metaphorically as if they were stalks of grain to be shredded. Niehaus likens the Syrians' treatment of the Israelites with threshing boards to the Assyrian practice of impaling people and skinning them alive.⁴²

We are not told when Syria committed these atrocities. However, two possibilities include the invasions and victories of Syria over Israel during the reign of

⁴⁰ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and The Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 242.

⁴¹ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 239.

⁴² Niehaus, *Amos*, 341.

king Hazael and king Ben-hadad. These battles occurred during the reign of Jehu in 2 Kings 8:28-29; 10:32-33 and king Jehoahaz in 2 Kings 13:1-7 at approximately 842-802 B.C.⁴³

Syria's *judgment* (1:4-5) will include fire sent by the LORD Himself upon the king's house and strongholds. The gate of Damascus will be destroyed resulting in the vulnerability of the remaining peoples in the land. The whole country from the south, "Valley of Aven" to the north, "Ben-edon" will fall. Syria's rule will be brought to an end as evidenced by the fact that they will be exiled to Kir; their place of origin, cf. Amos 9:7.

Fire is frequently included as part of God's judgment against these nations. It was a key part of divine judgment in the ancient Near East and was often used in warfare and was frequently regarded as a "means whereby a god purged away rebellious people."⁴⁴

This *judgment was fulfilled* by the Assyrians who conquered Damascus, killed king Rezin and took the people into exile to Kir. Pekah the king of Israel and Rezin king of Damascus had mounted an attack against king Ahaz of Judah. Ahaz appealed to the king of Assyria, Tiglath-pileser III who came to Judah's aid and defeated Damascus.⁴⁵

The Oracle Against Gaza (Philistia) 1:6-8

The reason for the judgment upon Philistia was their failure to treat people, created in God's image, with human dignity (1:6b). They engaged in slave trading as they kidnapped "a whole people" for the purpose of selling them for profit. The victims

⁴³ Niehaus, *Amos*, 340; Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 239.

⁴⁴ Niehaus, *Amos*, 341.

⁴⁵ 2 Kings 16:5-9.

of this slave trade are not identified. It probably included Israelites but regardless it constituted a crime against humanity.

A major trade route ran from Gaza through Beersheba and on to Edom which provided a convenient way to ship these people off to other nations.⁴⁶

Philistia's *judgment* (1:7-8) was similar to Syria's in that the LORD would send fire against Gaza which would destroy her strongholds. Three additional city states of Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron which comprise part of Philistia will experience extensive judgment as both the common people (inhabitants) as well as the leadership (him who holds the scepter) will be targeted. The destruction will be thorough. Even the remnant will perish.

Niehaus suggests that this prophecy was partially *fulfilled* when this territory came under the control of the Assyrians during the reigns of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.) and Assurbanipal (668-627 B.C.).⁴⁷

The Oracle Against Tyre (Phoenicia) 1:9-10

The *reason for the judgment* against Tyre, the leading city of Phoenicia, was that, similarly to Philistia, they were guilty of engaging in slave trade. One distinction between Tyre and Philistia was that Tyre was guilty of selling slaves whereas Philistia was guilty of both capturing and selling them. Regardless, Tyre was guilty of inhumane treatment of others motivated by monetary greed. The fact that both Philistia and Tyre were involved in selling slaves to Edom has led to the suggestion that perhaps Tyre,

⁴⁶ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 241.

⁴⁷ Niehaus, *Amos*, 346.

Philistia and Edom were involved in an organized business of trafficking slaves.⁴⁸

In addition to the sin of selling slaves, Tyre was also guilty of violating the "covenant of brotherhood." This expression is probably an indication that they had alliances with the very people they sold as slaves. Historically when two kings entered into a covenant they referred to themselves as brothers as seen in 1 Kings 20:32. Niehaus holds that the relationship in view in Amos 1:9 is the one between king Solomon and king Hiram of Tyre.⁴⁹ Violating covenants is highly offensive to God and this sin further exposed Tyre's vulnerability to God's judgment.

The succinct statement of *judgment* (1:10) stated that fire would be sent against the wall of Tyre resulting in the destruction of her fortresses.

Regarding the *fulfillment of this judgment*, Tyre came under the domination of Assyria paying tribute to several of the Assyrian leaders for extensive periods of time. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had Tyre under his control for thirteen years from 604 - 562 B.C. Subsequently, Alexander the Great captured the city after a seven-month siege in 332 B.C. resulting ironically in thirty-thousand people being sold as slaves. Ultimately Tyre was appropriated by the Saracens in A.D. 1291 and it now exists as a ruin.⁵⁰

The Oracle Against Edom 1:11-12

The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, from whom the Israelites descended. Despite the blood relationship between these two peoples their history is marked by deep-rooted anger, jealousy and opposition. This turbulent

⁴⁸ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 241.

⁴⁹ 1 Kings 5:12; 9:13.

⁵⁰ Niehaus, *Amos*, 349.

relationship ultimately dates back to Jacob deceiving his father Isaac and receiving the birthright blessing instead of Esau.⁵¹ While Jacob and Esau reconciled their descendants did not.⁵²

The *reason for the judgment* against Edom (1:11) was their failure to honour the blood relationship which called for special obligations of support and love. Instead Edom is charged with pursuing his brother with the sword and harboring pent up hostility and anger against him. Israel was also guilty of not treating the Edomites as brothers either.⁵³ However, the focus here is the conduct of the Edomites.

As *judgment* the LORD promised to send fire upon Teman and to destroy the strongholds of Bozrah (1:12). Both Teman and Bozrah were key cities of Edom. Teman is one of the descendants from Esau and his offspring apparently occupied the southern region of Edom.⁵⁴ Bozrah is a northern city of Edom and since judgment is promised against both these southern and northern cities, it signifies that all of Edom would be impacted.⁵⁵

Regarding *the fulfillment of this judgment*, Edom paid tribute to several of the Assyrian rulers including Adad-nearari III (810-783 B.C.) as well as Tiglath-pileser III, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Edom was subsequently conquered by the Babylonians under king Nebuchadnezzar according to Jeremiah 27:1-7.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Genesis 27.

⁵² Genesis 33.

⁵³ 1 Kings 11:15-16; 2 Kings 8:20-22; 14:7.

⁵⁴ Genesis 36:11,15; Niehaus, *Amos*, 351.

⁵⁵ Niehaus, *Amos*, 352.

⁵⁶ Niehaus, *Amos*, 351.

The Oracle Against Ammon 1:13-15

The fifth and sixth oracles are directed against the two nations that descended from Lot. The Ammonites and Moabites are named after the two grandsons of Lot by incestuous relationships which Lot had with his two daughters.⁵⁷ As a result these two nations, like the Edomites, have a blood relationship with God's covenant people.

The *reason for the judgment* against the Ammonites (1:13b) was the manner in which they engaged in military conflict while attempting to expand their geographical territory into the region of Gilead. They savagely attacked pregnant women killing them and their unborn children.

Such human atrocities would have been committed with the intent of instilling fear in those inhabitants occupying the territory they wanted to possess.⁵⁸ These inhabitants were probably Israelites and so the Ammonites were guilty of doing violence to their own relatives.⁵⁹ This kind of inhumane behavior is consistent with the conduct of the Ammonites described in 1 Samuel 11-12. They agreed to allow the Israelites to live in Jabesh-Gilead but on the condition that the Israelites allow them to gouge out their right eyes. Such human atrocities invite God's judgment.

As *judgment* Amos announced that a fire would be brought against Rabbah, the capital city of Ammon, and during this future military conflict their fortresses would be destroyed (1:14-15). In addition, their king and other leaders would go into exile. The battle in which these events would occur is described in terms of a powerful storm. This

⁵⁷ Genesis 19:30-38.

⁵⁸ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 243.

⁵⁹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 383-384.

imagery is used elsewhere in the prophets where it depicts a theophany in which God Himself carries out His wrath.⁶⁰ Other nations are involved but it is God at work using these nations to bring about His purposes.

The judgment against Ammon was *fulfilled* during the Assyrian conquest in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III in 734 B.C.⁶¹

The Oracle Against Moab 2:1-3

The *reason for the judgment* against the Moabites was because they were guilty of desecrating a human body as they burned the bones of the king of Edom to ashes (2:1b). Their actions would have necessitated desecrating the royal tomb in order to access the body. In the Ancient Near East, a premium was placed on having a proper burial and tombs were secured by means of having curses pronounced on any who violated this social protocol.⁶² It was believed that a proper burial guaranteed peace in the afterlife, and possibly immortality itself. By destroying the human body in this manner, the Moabites perhaps were hoping to prevent this king ever experiencing resurrection but instead being assigned to eternal death.⁶³ This violation by the Moabites reflected the intensity of their anger against the Edomites.

The *judgment* assigned to the Moabites (2:2-3) was similar to the judgment of the Ammonites. A devastating fire and a military conflict, in which they would be

⁶⁰ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 243; Niehaus, *Amos*, 354-355; cf. Isaiah 29:6; Nahum 1:3.

⁶¹ Donald Sunukjian, *Amos*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary Old Testament, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1430.

⁶² Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 334. Cf. also James B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 661-662 for examples of curses such as the following, "Whoever you are who shall do wrong and remove me, may Sahr, Nikkal, and Nusk cause him to die a miserable death, and may his posterity perish!"

⁶³ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 314-315.

overwhelmed by an enemy, would result in the exile of their king and government leaders. The military stronghold of Kerioth, which housed a temple devoted to their god Chemosh, would also be destroyed and ultimately Moab would die.⁶⁴

Regarding *fulfillment*, Moab, as with Ammon, fell to the Assyrians in the days of Tiglath-Pileser III.⁶⁵

The Oracle Against Judah 2:4-5

This seventh oracle is the first of two judgment speeches directed against God's covenant people. Israel would have been pleasantly surprised to hear Amos pronounce judgment against his own people but they would have enthusiastically concurred with his assessment.

The *reason for the judgment* against the southern kingdom of Judah was because they had rejected the law of the LORD and had been unfaithful to its commands and regulations (2:4). Instead of following God's law they embraced the lies that led their fathers astray. Some understand the "lies" to be a reference to idolatry or the worship of false gods. During this time they were engaged in the worship of Baal believing that he was the god of fertility and prosperity when in reality these blessings came from the LORD.⁶⁶ Another viewpoint argues that this word translated "lies" refers to the lies of false prophets and political leaders.⁶⁷ While these lies could include idolatry and false gods it is a broader word that can include embracing the attitudes, value systems and

⁶⁴ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 244; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 315.

⁶⁵ Sunukjian, *Amos*, 1430.

⁶⁶ Niehaus, *Amos*, 361-362.

⁶⁷ Francis Andersen and David Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 24A (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1989), 302. Andersen and Freedman hold that there is no place in the Old Testament where this word means "idol, god" and that in most cases it refers to the teachings of the false prophets.

actions of their neighboring nations.⁶⁸ By becoming like the surrounding nations they rejected the Law and as a result they were unfaithful to their covenant responsibilities.

As *judgment*, Amos announced that the LORD would send fire upon Judah and the fortresses of the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed (2:5).

This prophecy of *judgment was fulfilled* one-hundred and fifty years later when the city of Jerusalem fell after a lengthy siege during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon in 586 B.C.⁶⁹

The Oracle Against Israel 2:6-16

The final oracle is directed against an unsuspecting Israelite audience. They would not have been anticipating a word of judgment because they believed their economic prosperity and political stability evidenced God's pleasure. So confident were they of God's favor that they longed for the Day of the Lord when their enemies would be put down.⁷⁰ However, they had grossly miscalculated, as this final judgment speech makes clear.

Chisholm's comments regarding the government administration during the time of Amos is helpful in understanding some of the specific charges he leveled in this judgment speech. He writes:

A royal military bureaucracy ruled Israel at this time. As this bureaucracy expanded it acquired more and more land and gradually commandeered the economy and legal system. At various administrative levels, it invited bribery and other dishonest practices. The common people outside the administrative centers, through confiscatory taxation, conscription, excessive interest rates, and other oppressive measures, were gradually disenfranchised and lost their landed

⁶⁸ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 255.

⁶⁹ 2 Kings 25:8-10; Jeremiah 39:8.

⁷⁰ Amos 5:18.

property and, with it, their means of survival and their rights as citizens.⁷¹

The overarching *reason for God's judgment* upon Israel is the social injustice they inflicted upon the poor, the weak and the vulnerable in violation of the requirements of the Law (2:6b-8). Amos cites several examples of social injustice against Israel in declaring their guilt.

First of all, the wealthy had taken advantage of those to whom they had lent money as "they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals" (2:6b) without legal recourse for the debtors. The lenders foreclosed on their loans to honorable people (righteous) when they were not able to pay off their debts on demand. Greedy lenders forced borrowers to lose everything they had even for small loans, depicted as a pair of sandals. The covenant detailed special provisions for how the poor and the vulnerable were to be treated.⁷² However, during the days of Amos the hearts of the greedy knew no mercy and those who were not able to quickly pay off their debts were sold as slaves.

Secondly, the poor and weak were being mistreated as demonstrated in 2:7. The specific manner in which the poor were being trampled "into the dust of the earth" is not identified. Such treatment is reflective of the power of one group being exerted on another resulting in intimidation and humiliation.⁷³ The intensity of such mistreatment is reflected in the poor being denied basic human rights as the afflicted are turned aside (2:7b). It is possible that this action refers to certain people being denied justice in court

⁷¹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 385.

⁷² Exodus 21:2-11; 22:25-27; Deuteronomy 15:12-18.

⁷³ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 257.

but Paul and Smith argue for a broader understanding of the phrase depicting that the poor and needy were mistreated in multiple ways.⁷⁴

The meaning of the phrase "a man and his father go in to the same girl" resulting in God's name being profaned is generally understood as a reference to immoral sexual conduct (2:7c). It possibly refers to fathers having sexual relations with their daughter-in-laws, or sexual prostitution that was occurring at the Baal temples, or inappropriate sexual conduct with household employees.⁷⁵ The word translated "girl" meaning "young woman" argues against the viewpoint that a slave or prostitute is in view.⁷⁶ Despite the numerous prohibitions that the Law stated governing sexual relations including the forbidding of fathers and sons to have sex with the same women or the protection afforded to the vulnerable female slaves, it is apparent that in Amos' day God's Law was being disregarded.⁷⁷ Fathers were violating their commitment to fidelity and the marriage covenant and to make matters worse they were using their power to take advantage of vulnerable women in the process. The violation of God's standards of purity and holiness profaned His name.

An alternate viewpoint regarding the meaning of the phrase "a man and his father go in to the same girl" is put forward by Chisholm. He holds that sexual misconduct is not in view since the "Hebrew expression translated "go to" ... is never used elsewhere in

⁷⁴ Cf. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 257 and Paul, *Amos*, 81 who contend that when this phrase is linked with court injustice other descriptors are used making it clear that a court context is in view (Amos 5:12 cf. Deuteronomy 16:19; Proverbs 17:23; Isaiah 10:2).

⁷⁵ David Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 150; Sunukjian, *Amos*, 1431; Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 258.

⁷⁶ Cf. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 150; Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 258; Paul, *Amos*, 81.

⁷⁷ Exodus 21:7-11; Leviticus 10:20-22; Leviticus 18:8, 15, 17; 20:10-20.

the Hebrew Bible of sexual intercourse."⁷⁸ Instead he suggests that Amos is referring to the pagan marzeah-banquet which is also alluded to in Amos 6:4-7. He describes this banquet as a certain kind of social religious club where wealthy people gathered to "eat and drink to excess, perhaps in conjunction with mourning ceremonies for the dead."⁷⁹ The "young woman" in question is their hostess. Amos, he contends, through this description was highlighting the extravagant lifestyle that the wealthy were engaging in at the expense of the poor while displaying a willingness to embrace pagan practices.⁸⁰

Chisholm's viewpoint fits well with the flow of Amos' thought as he decries the ways of the wealthy as they override the rights of the poor. However, the preponderance of commentators understands the phrase as referring to some type of sexual misconduct.

Amos demonstrated in 2:8 that the shameful conduct of the wealthy in violating the rights of the poor manifested itself in hypocritical worship and he provided two examples. First of all, they violated the covenant by taking the garments of their debtors as pledges and not returning them as required by the law. While the law provided for garments to be given as pledges to the money-lenders it also required that the garment be returned each evening as it was the means of warmth for the borrower.⁸¹ Not only did the lender not return the garment to the borrower, but they flaunted their disobedience by laying on these garments in the temple as they worshiped. Secondly, judges who received payments of fines from the poor by means of jugs of wine, kept these payments for themselves and drank their stolen wine in the place of worship.⁸²

⁷⁸ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 385.

⁷⁹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 385.

⁸⁰ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 385.

⁸¹ Exodus 22:25-27; Deuteronomy 24:12-13.

⁸² Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 258.

God is offended by those who oppress and Israel, of all people, should have known that. Significant moments in Israel's history demonstrate that God aligns Himself not with the oppressor but with the oppressed as Amos confirmed in 2:9-10. For example, after Israel had been oppressed by the Egyptians, God rescued them from bondage and provided for them during the wilderness years so that He might bring them in to the Promised Land. Again, during the time of the conquest in the days of Joshua, God intervened on behalf of His people and destroyed the powerful Amorites.

God's continued goodness to His people was demonstrated by Him raising up two groups of people who were designed to be a blessing to His people, namely the Nazirites and the prophets (2:11). Nazirites were people were raised up by God to live and model lives dedicated to God.⁸³ The vows of the Nazirites, as detailed in Numbers 6:1-21, included a vow "not to cut their hair as a mark of separation, abstinence from wine as a mark of self-denial, and avoidance of the dead as a mark of purity."⁸⁴ In addition to the Nazirites, God had raised up prophetic messengers who faithfully challenged God's people to right-living through covenant faithfulness. These two groups of people were gracious provisions of God to His people. However, the Israelites, rather than being thankful for these people, rejected them. They enticed the Nazirites to break their vows and forbade the prophets to prophesy (2:12). This rejection of the ways of God by the wealthy elite of Amos' day, when seen against the historical backdrop of God's goodness, exposed their vulnerability to His judgment.

⁸³ Two examples of Nazirites in the Old Testament include Samson (Judges 13:1-5) and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11,22,28; 2:20). Samuel is never specifically called a Nazirite.

⁸⁴ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 318-319.

God's *judgment* of Israel (2:13-16) will result in their powerful army being crushed. Amos employs a variety of descriptions depicting that Israel's elite army would be destroyed which implied the ultimate fall of the nation. Verse 13 describes the action of God while the remaining verses 14-16 describe the consequences of His action.

Just as an agricultural cart groans and creaks when it is weighed down with grain so Israel will feel weighed down and crushed as God presses them down in judgment (2:13). A seven-fold description follows highlighting that Israel's "judgment would be thorough and complete. Israel's army, including swift infantry, archers, and horsemen, would be entirely destroyed."⁸⁵

This *judgment was fulfilled* during the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C. resulting in Israel's captivity.

By climaxing these judgment speeches with declaring judgment on Israel, the LORD affirms that He is sovereign over all nations and holds all peoples accountable for their actions, especially the covenant people of God. Social injustice might not have appeared to Israel, or even to the reader today, to be as offensive as the crimes other nations committed, such as ripping open the stomachs of pregnant women. However, Israel enjoyed the special privilege of being God's covenant people and greater privilege brings greater responsibility. Judgment begins at the household of God.

Five Messages Of Judgment Against Israel 3:1-6:14

Summary Statement For 3:1-6:14

Having established that Israel would be judged by God Amos expanded on this

⁸⁵ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 386.

reality through a series of sermons and messages in which he addressed the "why" and the "what" of God's judgment. These proclamations exposed the deficiencies of Israel's worldview whereby they had wrongly concluded that they were exempt from God's judgment.

A Sermon Announcing Israel's Destruction 3:1-15

The phrase "hear this word" in 3:1 is designed to get the attention of the listeners/readers and it introduces not only this sermon but the messages which follow in this section.

This first message affirms that God's judgment against Israel is rooted in the uniqueness of the covenant relationship which bound the two parties together. Israel, all twelve tribes, belongs to the LORD in a way that no other nation does. Israel was aware of this reality and it was this truth which they wrongly concluded exempted them from God's judgment.

Through a series of rhetorical questions in 3:3-8 Amos demonstrated a cause/effect relationship existed between God's covenant with Israel and the consequences of judgment they were going to experience. Each of the questions anticipates an obvious answer. While 3:3 asks just one question the other verses present two questions arranged in parallel structure. The question in 3:3 presents a translational issue. The wording of the KJV "Can two walk together except they be agreed" is rendered differently in other translations.⁸⁶ The ESV states, "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet" and similarly with the NIV, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?"⁸⁷

⁸⁶ King James Version, 1967.

⁸⁷ New International Version, 1984.

Some commentators translate the verb as "met" so to render the phrase, "Can two walk together unless they have met?" Such a rendering emphasizes the idea that the LORD and Israel, as two parties, have met together in covenant relationship.

The second set of questions (#'s2-3) relate to how a lion hunts and captures its prey (3:4). It roars just prior to pouncing on its prey so as to paralyze the victim with fear. The roar of the lion is linked to the LORD's roar in 3:8 which fits the imagery of 1:2 depicting the LORD as a lion who roars from Zion. Here in this message the LORD's roar precedes His judgment on His people.

Questions 4 and 5 high-light two ways to capture birds, namely, through a trap or a snare (3:5). Herein, Amos further demonstrated the relationship between cause and effect inasmuch as the bird does not fall in a snare if there is no trap and the snare does not spring up if nothing has been caught.

In 3:6 the sounding of a trumpet, designed to alert people in the city to the presence of an enemy, results in people being filled with fear. Up until now, Amos arranged his questions in a manner designed to elicit a unified response to each one. His final question, which asks whether a disaster comes against a city unless the LORD is behind the action, might not yield an immediate "yes" from the listeners. As mentioned earlier, Israel believed their relationship with God exempted them from judgment and this therefore accounted for why they were longing for the Day of the LORD.⁸⁸ To give the anticipated answer of "yes" would require them to concede that whenever they have experienced judgment it has been because of God's activity. Such an acknowledgment

⁸⁸ Amos 5:18.

would reflect the deception of their current reasoning.

As Amos concluded this section (3:7-8) he demonstrated that a cause and effect relationship existed not only in the natural world but in the spiritual realm as well as he highlighted his own ministry as a prophet.⁸⁹ Having affirmed that disaster comes on a city because of God's activity, he stated that when God is going to engage in such action, He reveals it to His prophets, which in this case was Amos. The lion has roared and fear should fill His people. God had spoken and he, as the prophet, must speak (3:8).

In the second major part of the message Amos announced that the LORD would bring judgment upon Israel because they were guilty of oppression, social injustice and corrupt worship (3:9-15).

Characteristic of covenant lawsuits is the summoning of witnesses which occurs in 3:9-10 where Ashdod (Philistines) and Egypt are called to the mountains of Samaria, the capital city of Israel, to witness the oppression and social injustice occurring in Israel.⁹⁰ Israel from their own experience with the Philistines and Egyptians knew that these two nations were masterful in the art of these sinful crafts which therefore aptly qualified them to detect oppression and social injustice among God's people. It is possible however that Israel had mastered the practice of these evils to such a degree that by inviting the Philistines and Egyptians to be witnesses, the LORD was implying that they were morally superior to God's people.⁹¹

These witnesses would see the oppression present among God's people in the

⁸⁹ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 72, 75.

⁹⁰ There is some discussion whether this message exhibits a full-fledged covenant lawsuit or whether it contains just an element or two of this form.

⁹¹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 388.

midst of the chaos and violence. Israel had become so focused on the pursuit of "things" that she had lost her moral compass resulting in her inability to discern what was right. While accumulating wealth and spoil through lawless, corrupt, violent practices she was heaping up future judgment by God against herself.⁹²

This future judgment of God will destroy Israel's strongholds leaving only remnant reminders of her former extravagant lifestyle (3:11-12). Israel will experience a taste of her own medicine as an enemy will overtake and plunder her just as she had previously plundered others. This future invasion of Israel is illustrated by the attack of a lion on the herd in which remaining fragments provide evidence for the shepherd of what once was. In Israel's case the remnants left over following the attack, namely, "the corner of a couch and part of a bed" (3:12) will serve as a reminder of what had been her luxurious, extravagant lifestyle. By this expression Amos conveyed that "either they would perish suddenly while living lavishly, sprawled on beds and couches or that the number of Israelites who survived the disaster would be like the few bits of a mutilated sheep left by the lion, or like a few scraps of furniture salvaged from a looted city."⁹³

According to 3:13-15 when this future judgment took place special attention would be directed against their place of worship and the materialism associated with their extravagant lifestyle. In 3:13a, the witnesses were summoned to "hear" (probably God's verdict) and to "testify" by giving evidence concerning Israel's transgression and the completeness of God's judgment.⁹⁴ Such judgment was certain because the "LORD God,

⁹² Paul, *Amos*, 117 and Andersen and Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 407.

⁹³ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 80; Anderson and Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 410.

⁹⁴ Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 161.

the God of hosts", the One who is ruler of all the armies in heaven and earth, was at war with His own people.⁹⁵ He will bring judgment against the worship center at Bethel and the false worship system by destroying the altars of Bethel. The horns of the altar would be cut off signifying there would no longer be a place of protection or refuge for God's people enabling them to escape God's judgment.⁹⁶

Not only would the worship center be destroyed but also that which symbolized the extravagant lifestyle of the wealthy (3:15). Specifically, the homes of the wealthy class that had been built by oppressing the poor would be destroyed. Winter and summer houses were associated with the luxury belonging to kings in the Ancient Near East but in the days of Amos this had now become the experience of the wealthy.⁹⁷ Whether the winter and summer houses were located in different locations or whether they were separate parts belonging to one structure, they symbolized wealth and luxury.⁹⁸ These great houses with their sprawling, spacious structures, donned with the elaborate decor of ivory, had a date of destiny with God's judgment and they would come to an end.

A Sermon Announcing Israel's Sinfulness 4:1-13

Amos began this sermon by pronouncing a judgment of exile on the wives of the elite men of Samaria for their persistent sin of materialism made possible by exploiting the poor (4:1-3). The phrase "cows of Bashan" is a figurative description of the women who are the wives of the men of Samaria. Bashan is a geographical part of the land known for its fertility, great pasture land, well-nourished cattle and strong oak trees.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 161.

⁹⁶ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 388. Cf. Exodus 21:14; 1 Kings 1:5-2:28.

⁹⁷ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 388.

⁹⁸ Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 201.

⁹⁹ Cf. Deuteronomy 32:14; Psalm 22:12; Isaiah 33:9; Jeremiah 50:19; Ezekiel 39:18; Micah 7:14;

The "cows of Bashan" metaphor used for these women portrays the idea they were well looked after just as the literal cows of Bashan were well nourished. These women were the wives of the rich government officials/administrators who lived in Samaria.¹⁰⁰ The women repeatedly made the demands and their husbands attempted to satisfy their insatiable desires by exploiting the poor (4:1).¹⁰¹

Such conduct invited the judgment of God which was certain to occur as evidenced by the use of the oath formula, "The Lord God has sworn" (4:2). Wolff states: "When the oath formula replaces the messenger formula, the irrevocable nature of that which is proclaimed is set forth in the strongest terms."¹⁰²

Just as the "fat cows of Bashan" would be prepared and taken away for slaughter, so these women of Samaria would be taken away in exile (4:2). Drawing on another metaphor the prophet envisioned a time when these women would be taken away, exiled "with fish hooks." Or just like fish were packed away in containers and sent off to market, so these women would be sent into exile in a future day.¹⁰³

Exiting the city through breaches in the walls (4:3) highlighted the people's vulnerability as the structure which was designed to enclose the "cows" was no longer secure. The identity of Harmon, the place where the exiles would be sent, is not certain. However, the messenger formula, which concludes the paragraph, confirms that these women who enjoyed an extravagant luxurious lifestyle by oppressing the poor and

Nahum 1:4.

¹⁰⁰ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 388.

¹⁰¹ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 85.

¹⁰² Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 206.

¹⁰³ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 388; cf. also Paul, *Amos*, 134-135 who after reviewing the major options regarding the translation of "hooks" and "fish hooks" in Amos 4:2 proposes that the verse be rendered "And you will be transported in baskets, and the very last one of you ... in fishermen's pots ..."

marginalized would experience the firm hand of God's judgment.

God's displeasure of Israel's hypocritical worship was powerfully conveyed through the art of sarcasm in 4:4-5. While Israel perceived God was pleased with their worship, the LORD regarded their worship as not worship at all. Israel was guilty of a mechanistic view of God in which they religiously brought their sacrifices and tithes to the worship centers at Bethel and Gilgal. However, because they simultaneously lived in violation of the very Law which prescribed these expressions of devotion and worship their worship was hollow. They were engaged in doing the right things but in the wrong way. Their actions looked right but they did not flow from a heart of devotion.

Israel would have been shocked by the invitation from Amos to come to the worship centers to sin. Historically, Bethel and Gilgal held rich spiritual significance for Israel. Bethel was a place where the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob had special encounters with God.¹⁰⁴ Gilgal was the place where Israel first camped after crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land. It was place of covenant fulfillment and spiritual renewal.¹⁰⁵ However, these two places now house worship centers where Israel is invited to come and sin by means of hypocritical worship.

The LORD had been faithful to His covenant promises by bringing covenant curses against Israel because of their unfaithfulness but these attempts to get her attention were unsuccessful (4:6-13). Five times the words "yet you have not returned to Me declares the LORD" are repeated highlighting Israel's unwillingness to repent (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). As a result, a more severe intervention from God would be required in order to

¹⁰⁴ Genesis 12:8; 28:19.

¹⁰⁵ Joshua 4-5.

capture Israel's attention as conveyed in the following verses.

The seven covenant curses (4:6-11) leveled by the LORD against Israel flow out of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They include: famine (4:6 cf. Leviticus 26:26), drought (4:7-8 cf. Leviticus 26:19; Deuteronomy 28:22-24), blight and mildew (4:9a cf. Deuteronomy 28:22), locusts (4:9b cf. Deuteronomy 28:38, 42), plagues (4:10a cf. Leviticus 26:14; Deuteronomy 28:21-22, 27, 35, 59-61), the sword (4:10b cf. Leviticus 26:25, 33), and earthquake (4:11 cf. Deuteronomy 29:23). Since seven can depict fullness and completion, Israel perhaps thought they had suffered the full expression of the Lord's judgment.¹⁰⁶ However, since the end purpose of these disciplines was always restoration, and since Israel remained recalcitrant, Amos adds a surprising eighth curse. Israel must now prepare to meet her awesome God in a special time of judgment (4:12-13). The call to "prepare to meet your God" is neither a call to repentance nor a call of covenant renewal but rather it is a call to judgment.¹⁰⁷ Since Israel had failed to return to her God, He as "Lord of the covenant" would now come to her in overwhelming judgment.¹⁰⁸

Paul affirms that Amos draws on a hymn in 4:13 as a means of revealing the nature of the God who will judge Israel. Other hymns are found in Amos including 5:8-9 and 9:5-6.¹⁰⁹ This doxology celebrates the awesome nature of God by highlighting His work of creating, revealing and judging.¹¹⁰ His creative power is manifested in the creation of the mountains and wind and His revealing power is witnessed in His ability to

¹⁰⁶ Paul, *Amos*, 151.

¹⁰⁷ Paul, *Amos*, 151.

¹⁰⁸ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 93.

¹⁰⁹ Paul, *Amos*, 152.

¹¹⁰ Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 171.

reveal man's inner thoughts.¹¹¹ He is the maker of morning and darkness and everything in between.¹¹² As the One who treads on the heights of the earth, He is sovereign over all and "the created order answers to Him."¹¹³ This one is the LORD, the God of hosts; the One who is Lord of the principalities and powers and He is the One who Israel must meet in judgment!¹¹⁴

A Sermon Announcing Israel's Funeral 5:1-17

Amos pronounced a dirge over Israel in view of the impending judgment that God was going to execute against the nation and he appealed for them to seek God in repentance. A dirge would have shocked Israel. They perceived they were enjoying the blessing of God and therefore it was a time for celebration, not sorrow. However, Amos painted a different picture.

Once again, the phrase "hear this word" is repeated signaling the commencement of a new literary unit (5:1a). That Amos is pronouncing a lament is clear from the words, "I take up over you in lamentation" (5:1b). Two images are used to depict the sadness and emotional intensity associated with the lamenting that was appropriate for Israel's situation. Israel is depicted as a virgin who is entering the prime of young womanhood with all the potential of a bright future ahead but alas life is unexpectedly ripped from her as she is struck down and afflicted (5:2).¹¹⁵ A second, equally powerful image portrays a nation's military that goes out to fight and experiences a crushing, humiliating defeat resulting in 90% losses. A thousand go out to battle but only one hundred survive; one

¹¹¹ Niehaus, *Amos*, 407.

¹¹² Niehaus, *Amos*, 407.

¹¹³ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 340.

¹¹⁴ Ephesians 6:12.

¹¹⁵ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 390.

hundred go out but only ten survive (5:3). These two demoralizing experiences depict the actual condition of Israel before God and accounts for the fitting response of a dirge pronounced by the prophet.

The somber depiction of Israel's impending judgment is immediately followed with an expression of God's mercy as Amos urged the people to repent and seek refuge in God and not in their ritualistic empty worship (5:4-5). Twice over the people are urged to seek the Lord and live (5:4b, 6a) implying that a failure to do so will result in God's inevitable judgment. The specific command not to seek their worship centers would have shocked the people. They equated going to the worship centers with seeking God but instead they are told not to "seek Bethel and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba" (5:5). Each of these places was a part of Israel's rich spiritual heritage. Bethel was the place where God chose to reveal Himself to the patriarch Jacob.¹¹⁶ Gilgal was the first place where Israel camped in the Promised Land and was a place of spiritual renewal.¹¹⁷ Beersheba, located in the southern kingdom, is linked with each of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a place of worship and God's self-revelation.¹¹⁸ However, even these places would experience God's judgment if Israel failed to repent, as Bethel would be brought to nothing and Gilgal, the very place associated with Israel's possession of the Promised Land, would be exiled (5:5). Chisholm references a word play that exists in the original language that is not captured by the English translation. The phrase "shall surely go into exile" sounds a lot like "Gilgal."¹¹⁹ The empty,

¹¹⁶ Genesis 28.

¹¹⁷ Joshua 4-5.

¹¹⁸ Genesis 21:33; 26:23-25; 46:1-4.

¹¹⁹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 390.

meaningless ritualism which characterized Israel's worship at these worship centers would come to an end unless Israel repented.

Israel is enjoined to seek the LORD in repentance and live because they are destined to meet the sovereign One in judgment because they are guilty of social injustice (5:6-15). The reference to the "house of Joseph" (5:6a) meant that the whole house of Israel was in view and not just the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.¹²⁰ God's design for society to be governed or ordered by justice and righteousness had been perverted.¹²¹ Justice, which should be sweet, was now bitter because it had been perverted by the wealthy and powerful elite (5:7). The influential who used their power and influence to overturn matters of justice and righteousness would be held accountable by the LORD who is sovereign to change and overturn "things in His universe."¹²² He is the One who created the constellations, who orders day and night, commands the waters to obey Him thus governing the rainfall on the land. Additionally, He is sovereign over military might and controls the destruction of the strongholds (5:8-9). Drawing on this partial hymn, Amos celebrated that this is the One who holds Israel accountable; this One whose name is "LORD."

Examples of social injustice perpetrated by the powerful elite are cited in 5:10-12. Leveraging a corrupt judicial system through bribery, the powerful controlled the judicial outcomes resulting in increased hardship for the poor and marginalized. The wealthy not

¹²⁰ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 100.

¹²¹ Justice refers to legal matters such as fairness in the courts but it is a broader concept including the moral principles that were to order the way society works. Righteousness relates to the "fulfillment of responsibilities in a relationship," hence the idea of doing what is right. See Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 100.

¹²² Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 101.

only oppressed the poor but denied them the opportunity for legal recourse as they "turned aside the needy in the gate" (5:12). Through illicit gains, the wealthy built luxury houses and expansive vineyards. However, as an example of a judgment that fits the crime, *lex talionis*, the LORD promised that these things gained through their greed would be taken from them and others would get to live in the houses they had built and drink the wine from their vineyards (5:11). The corruption of society in Israel was so great that the wise considered it pointless to speak out against such immoral leadership (5:13).¹²³ An alternate understanding of 5:13 understands the word "prudent" to be better translated "prosperous." According to this view, these prosperous people who oppressed and violated the rights of the poor will be silenced "in death" or overwhelming grief in a future day when God's judgment falls on the nation.¹²⁴

Against this dark background of social injustice and impending judgment the LORD's mercy was profiled as Amos appealed again for Israel to seek the LORD in repentance so that they might live. To seek the LORD, meant they would "seek good, and not evil" manifested by ensuring that justice was meted out in the courts (5:15). If they sought the LORD in genuine repentance they would be concerned for the poor and the oppressed. Elsewhere in the prophets the litmus test for covenant faithfulness is caring for the oppressed including the widow, the alien and the orphan.¹²⁵ Such repentance would ensure Israel of God's presence and it might result in God graciously withholding His hand of judgment (5:15b).

¹²³ Niehaus, *Amos*, 421.

¹²⁴ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 315; Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 105.

¹²⁵ Jeremiah 7:5-6; 22:3; Zechariah 7:9-10.

This sermon concluded the way that it began with a lament. Amos announced that there would be a time of great mourning and lamentation throughout the land because of God's judgment (5:16-17). The judgment would be extensive as people from all walks of life would be overcome with grief including those in the public square to those in the vineyards; from the farmers to the official mourners.

A Pronouncement Of Woe Because Of Israel's Hypocritical Worship 5:18-27

Amos delivered a woe oracle against the nation confirming their hypocritical worship would not enable them to escape God's judgment in the Day of the Lord.

Israel's inadequate understanding of the Day of the Lord resulted in their false sense of security. Instead of living in fear and dread they were longing for the Day (5:18a). They understood the Day of the Lord as a time when their enemy nations would be judged but they would be blessed.¹²⁶ Amos stated however that the Day of the Lord would be a time of darkness and inescapable judgment for Israel (5:18b-20). The inescapable nature of their judgment is portrayed in a hypothetical scenario in which one manages to escape both a lion and a bear in the wild but when they enter their house, a place of safety, a snake bites them and they die as a result (5:19).

Israel not only had an incomplete understanding of the Day of the Lord but they misperceived that the Lord was pleased with their worship. To Israel's shock, Amos confirmed their worship as hypocritical ritualism offensive to the Lord making God's judgment inevitable (5:21-27). While Israel's sacrificial system was God's idea, He always intended that such acts of worship would flow from a heart of devotion.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Obadiah 1:15-21.

¹²⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Israel's mechanistic view of God resulted in God's hatred and rejection of their ritualistic worship including their offerings and songs (5:21-23). Instead, He longed for Israel to have hearts of devotion manifested by an abundant, endless, stream of love, concern and social justice for their fellow man (5:24).

The precise understanding of 5:25-26 is unclear as several interpretive issues exist. However, what is abundantly clear is that the judgment God would bring upon Israel for her hypocritical worship was future exile "beyond Damascus" (5:27). History confirms that this promise of exile was fulfilled by the Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C. when the northern kingdom was captured and its inhabitants scattered.

Various interpretations have been postulated regarding the proper meaning of 5:25. An important consideration relates to how one should understand the question concerning Israel's sacrifices during the wilderness period and whether the verse should even be rendered as a question. If one understands 5:25 to be a question then there are a number of possible viewpoints regarding its proper meaning as summarized by Smith.

Verse 25 can be read (a) as a question whether God gave Israel any laws about sacrificing while they were in the desert of Sinai; (b) as a suggestion that people did not sacrifice during the desert years because they did not have many sheep (cf. Jer. 7:21-23); (c) as a claim that the desert generation offered sacrifices to other gods and "did not bring them to me [Yahweh]"; or (d) as a question whether the people only brought sacrifices and nothing else to God.¹²⁸

Smith argues that God did provide instructions concerning sacrifices in the Pentateuch and Israel did sacrifice in the wilderness.¹²⁹ Also, apart from the Golden Calf event there

¹²⁸ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 327.

¹²⁹ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 326. Cf. Exodus 20:5, 22-26; 23:14-19; 24:4-6; 29; 32:6-8; 34:13-20; 40:29.

are few examples that demonstrate that Israel regularly worshiped idols during the wilderness wanderings.¹³⁰ For these reasons, he argues that it is best to understand that the question asked in 5:25 is whether the people only brought sacrifices to God and nothing else during their years in the wilderness.¹³¹ The purpose of the question is to imply a negative answer thereby highlighting that there was more to Israel's relationship with God than sacrifices. God was always concerned with their heart of devotion and loyal obedience.

A key issue relating to a proper understanding of 5:26 pertains to whether the verse refers to the past or whether it predicts a future event. Translations like the NIV and NASB understand that the verse is referring to past events whereas the ESV depicts a future connotation. If past events are in view then the LORD is affirming that Israel's hypocritical worship has a long-standing history even dating back to their wilderness experience when Israel engaged in idolatrous worship. If the future is in view, then the emphasis is that Israel's current worship of these pagan deities will not prevent God's people from experiencing His judgment of exile. Both views condemn the worship of pagan deities and affirm that the consequence of hypocritical worship will be exile.

Determining the identity of Sikkuth and Kiyyun of 5:26 is another interpretive issue.¹³² Sikkuth is understood by many as the name of an Assyrian god which was linked with the planet Saturn and was also known by the name Kiyyun.¹³³ Others

¹³⁰ Exodus 32; Numbers 25.

¹³¹ See Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 393 who also highlights the possibility of understanding the question in this manner.

¹³² The uncertainty of the meaning of Amos 5:26 is further reflected in the quotation of this verse in Acts 7:43 which reflects a translational difference between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint. See Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 327 and Niehaus, *Amos*, 433-434.

¹³³ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 327.

understand that these are two different Mesopotamian deities.¹³⁴ The phrase "you shall take up" is either referring to transporting or carrying these idols, i.e. into captivity as rendered in the ESV or else it refers to these idols being lifted up for the purpose of worshiping them as reflected in the NIV translation.¹³⁵ Regardless, the prophet's message is clear that their idolatrous worship will result in the adverse consequences of exile which was subsequently fulfilled in the Assyrian captivity.

A Pronouncement Of Woe Because Of Israel's Materialistic Greed And False Sense Of Security 6:1-14

The final message of judgment in this literary unit is a woe oracle against "the wealthy royal bureaucrats" of Israel and Judah for their extravagant materialism which had produced a spirit of complacency and false sense of security.¹³⁶ While the southern kingdom of Judah is mentioned, the main thrust of the message (6:6, 14) is against the northern kingdom of Israel.¹³⁷ Both Zion and Samaria are referenced since they were the capital cities of their respective kingdoms. The leaders in both of these kingdoms seemed unaware of the precarious nature of their situation. Amos referred to the leaders of Israel as "the notable men of the first of the nations" perhaps sarcastically portraying their self-delusion as they viewed themselves as the top leaders of the top nation (6:1).

Discussion exists regarding the proper understanding of 6:2 as Amos drew a comparison between Israel and the city states of Calneh, Hamath and Gath. "Calneh and Hamath were both city-states to the north of Israel and ... Gath was a Philistine city-state

¹³⁴ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 394.

¹³⁵ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 328; Paul, *Amos*, 194-197.

¹³⁶ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 394.

¹³⁷ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 394.

on Judah's border."¹³⁸ In order to expose the dangers of their false sense of security Amos inquired as to whether Israel was better than these places or whether her territory was greater than theirs. The anticipated answer to these questions was "No."

One viewpoint holds that Amos was appealing for the leaders of Israel to consider these other places that were once influential but not any longer. Amos was thereby warning Israel's leaders that what happened to these cities could also happen to them.¹³⁹ The difficulty with this perspective is that these cities did not suffer their demise until 738 B.C. at the hands of the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III.¹⁴⁰ In order to circumvent this complication some suggest that this verse is a later inclusion in the text, written after the events of 738 B.C.¹⁴¹ However this is not a satisfying resolution if one embraces a high view of Scripture.

An alternate view understands that Amos 6:2 should be understood as a quotation belonging to the leaders of Israel; a statement which reflected their pride and sense of self-security. These leaders were claiming that no other city in their region could compare with the prestige, glory and advantage that characterized Israel. However, the challenge with this viewpoint is that there is nothing in the text which indicates that someone other than Amos is speaking. Additionally, it is clear from both the verse which precedes and follows that Amos is the one speaking which weakens the viewpoint that there is a shift in spokesman in 6:2.

A viewpoint which avoids the challenges of these previous two perspectives holds

¹³⁸ Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1*, 213.

¹³⁹ Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 274-275.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 339. Cf. also Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 202 and Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 395.

¹⁴¹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 395.

that Amos is contrasting Israel's extraordinary complacency with these other cities. These cities understood that they were vulnerable and needed to defend themselves. Since they were not the biggest or the most powerful they understood they were susceptible to attack.¹⁴² Israel by contrast was blinded by her own sense of significance and self-delusion and therefore was in danger of great judgment. Besides, even if Israel granted that Amos' message of warning would one day occur, they believed it was not an imminent threat (6:3).

A woe of judgment was pronounced by Amos upon the wealthy materialists as he described their extravagant lifestyle that would result in them being exiled as a nation (5:4-7). This wealthy class enjoyed the lifestyle that traditionally had been associated with royalty.¹⁴³ The poor would have been glad to have a bed of any kind but the rich had beds decorated with ivory. Stretched out on their couches conveys not merely the idea of comfort or relaxation but the notion of laziness or drunkenness or both.¹⁴⁴ Their choice of menu reflected the finest of dining as they enjoyed lamb and veal while eating meat was a rarity for most in Israel (6:4). Hubbard aptly states,

The general population lived on wheat and barley and whatever fruits and vegetables were at hand, and if they had meat at all, reserved it for the times of high celebration (cf. Luke 15:23). This was one reason that the peace offering ... was so highly valued by the common people. In contrast, Samaria's elite not only ate animals at random but put their *calves* in special *stalls* to fatten them, undoubtedly on grain wrested from the poor by cruel taxation (cf. 5:11).¹⁴⁵

Their care-free and leisurely lifestyle is further depicted as they listened to their music,

¹⁴² Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 339.

¹⁴³ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 118.

¹⁴⁴ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 118.

¹⁴⁵ Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 204-205.

drank wine from bowls normally used for sacrifices and pampered themselves with the finest of lotions (6:5).¹⁴⁶ Engaged in their self-absorbed, luxuriant lifestyle they were not concerned over the impending doom of their nation and remained seemingly unaware of the cloud of God's judgment hanging over them. However, the judgment that God had prepared for them was one that fit their situation. They would not only go into exile but ironically those who perceived themselves to be "first" (6:1) would be at the first of the line of those who would go into exile (6:7).¹⁴⁷

Invoking an oath, by drawing on His own name, the LORD announced His abhorrence of Israel's pride and the certain judgment He would bring upon them (6:8). Israel trusted in her military fortresses where they stored their plunder and believed that their city was invincible but instead God promised that He would give over the city and everything in it (6:8).¹⁴⁸

God's judgment against Israel will be extensive and thorough (6:9-14). Even if ten men, the smallest military unit, are able to find refuge in a house they will ultimately die (6:9). Those who look after burying the dead will be careful not to make any noise so as not to be detected or to mention the name of the LORD lest it invoke further judgment from God (6:10). From the great house to the little house, from the palace or the dwelling places of the wealthy to the houses of the least powerful, the breadth of God's judgment will be experienced 6:11.

The reason why judgment must fall on Israel is depicted in 6:12. Two questions

¹⁴⁶ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 395.

¹⁴⁷ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 395.

¹⁴⁸ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 121.

are asked which highlight Israel's foolish behavior of perverting justice by oppressing the poor and vulnerable and boasting in their own military accomplishments. It would be foolish to run horses on the rocks because of how it would hurt their feet and it would be silly to try to plough the rocks with oxen.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, it was foolish for Israel to pervert righteousness and social justice whereby the powerful and wealthy were empowered to take advantage of the poor and weak.

Under the reign of Jeroboam II Israel expanded her geographical territory. Rather than acknowledging that these accomplishments were God's gracious provisions, Israel in her pride, claimed to have achieved these successes in her own power and appealed to these achievements as evidence of God's pleasure (6:13). Smith provides a helpful summary when he writes:

Israel had recovered previous losses east of the Jordan as a result of the campaigning of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). Two of the cities he recovered were "Lo Debar" (probably a pun on the name of the Gadite city of Debir), which means "not a thing," and Karnaim (qarnāyim), which means "a pair of horns." Amos used the names to engage in biting sarcasm. Their rejoicing over "not a thing" and their saying (or thinking) they had by their own strength taken "a pair of horns" were alike prideful boastings. The horns of an animal were symbols of power or authority in Old Testament times."¹⁵⁰

Amos concludes this oracle by announcing that an unidentified enemy nation will be raised up by God to bring judgment against Israel for her prideful arrogance (6:14). The end result will be that the whole territory of Israel from the north to the south will be oppressed. Lebo-hamath is understood as Israel's northernmost border while the Brook

¹⁴⁹ Chisholm suggests alternate translations for this verse. Namely, "Do horses run on a cliff?" and "Does one plow the sea with an ox?" Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 396.

¹⁵⁰ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 123.

of the Arabah is the southernmost boundary.¹⁵¹ This description reflects that Israel's judgment will be thorough in which the gains experienced under Jeroboam II will be lost.¹⁵² Historically, the prophecy was fulfilled with the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. Such judgment was certain because it was declared by "the LORD, the God of hosts," a combined description which occurs only here in Amos and it conveys the Lord's sovereignty and control over "powerful armies either of angels ... or of men."¹⁵³

Five Visions Of Judgment Against Israel And Amos' Exchange With Amaziah 7:1-9:10

Summary Statement For 7:1-9:10

In a series of five visions Amos announced judgment that was going to fall upon Israel. Inserted between visions three and four is an autobiographical narrative which documents Amos' sharp exchange with Amaziah the priest which served to underscore why judgment must take place.

There are some notable comparisons and contrasts with the overall structure of the visions.¹⁵⁴ Each of the first four visions include a messenger formula followed by a revelation of the vision. In the first two visions the meaning of the vision is self-evident while in visions three and four the Lord explains the content. In visions one and two, Amos intercedes for the nation and the Lord graciously relents in response to Amos' prayer. In visions three and four following the explanation of the vision, Amos does not intercede and the Lord announces the judgment. The first two visions depict that

¹⁵¹ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 123.

¹⁵² Niehaus, *Amos*, 447.

¹⁵³ Niehaus, *Amos*, 388.

¹⁵⁴ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 126-127.

judgment is coming while visions three and four relay how that judgment will unfold.

The breakdown of fifth vision is distinctive from the previous four.

The Vision Of Locusts 7:1-3

Following the introductory messenger formula, "this is what the Lord, i.e. sovereign, LORD showed me" a vision of locusts is revealed to Amos (1:1). Destruction by locusts is one of the covenant curses promised in Deuteronomy 28 and is found throughout Old Testament writings.¹⁵⁵ The forming of the locusts speaks of God's creative power and the timing of their formation speaks of His sovereign control in bringing about the judgment at a time when it would have maximum effect.¹⁵⁶ The locusts were formed subsequent to the first harvest which belonged to the king but before the second harvest which belonged to the people which meant great hardship for the people.¹⁵⁷ Smith writes,

A locust swarm at the end of the rainy season, as the grass used the last available moisture for final growth, would result in tragedy for the farmers and their livestock. The onset of the dry season would allow no more growth until the next rainy season. No grass would be available for grazing or for making hay ... If the locust plague went on unchecked after the end of the rainy season, the result would be tragic indeed.¹⁵⁸

Since Amos understands the vision and the serious consequences it poses for God's people he immediately engages in intercession on behalf of the nation (3:2). He appeals to the "Sovereign Lord" asking Him to "forgive" which implies an understanding

¹⁵⁵ Joel 1:4; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14.

¹⁵⁶ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 128.

¹⁵⁷ The first harvest belonging to the king might have been a kind of Income Tax that was in place at the time. See J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Amos*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 153; Niehaus, *Amos*, 451.

¹⁵⁸ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 128.

that the judgment was merited.¹⁵⁹ Amos appeals to God's forbearance on the basis that Israel is small; a term which does not necessarily refer to their size but to their strength.¹⁶⁰ While Israel did not see themselves as small, Amos grasped their inability to withstand such a judgment.

The Lord graciously relents in response to the intercession of Amos and affirms that "it shall not be" (3:3). God's gracious withdrawal of His stated plan of action is reminiscent of what occurred with one of Israel's earlier prophets Moses. Following the incident of worshipping the Golden Calf, Moses interceded on behalf of the nation for God's judgment to be withdrawn and once again the Lord relented.¹⁶¹

The Vision Of Fire 7:4-6

The means of destruction in the second vision is fire. The extent of the fire would be so great that it "dries up the deep" and consumes the "land" (7:4). Niehaus comments,

Such a vision seems hyperbolic, but it is consistent with the Lord's power and the thoroughness of his judgment. The fire is powerful enough to consume the great deep, as well as the land of Israel, which the Lord had apportioned to his people ... Possibly there is an allusion here to the idea that the mountains were conceived of as rooted in the sea ... so that Amos' description implies destruction of mountains, earth, and sea.¹⁶²

In a further comment on the possible meaning of "the deep" Motyer suggests,

There may be a quasi-supernatural dimension in Amos' references to *the great deep*. In antiquity the 'deep' (*t^ehōm*) was thought of in pagan culture as the home of spiritual forces opposed to the Creator god ... All this would re-inforce the notion of a completely irresistible fire: nothing known in earth or in the world of the gods can stop it.¹⁶³

In response to the severity of God's judgment of fire Amos, as in the first vision,

¹⁵⁹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 397.

¹⁶⁰ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 129.

¹⁶¹ Niehaus, *Amos*, 452.

¹⁶² Niehaus, *Amos*, 454.

¹⁶³ Motyer, *The Message of Amos*, 154.

intercedes on behalf of Israel, asking the Lord to stop the judgment, appealing to the Lord's mercy on the basis that Jacob is small (7:5). For a second time, the Lord answers Amos' prayer and withholds the judgment (7:6).

The Vision Of The Plumb Line Or The Vision Of Tin 7:7-9

The third vision commences with the same messenger formula as the previous two but the structure of visions three and four differ from the previous two. One of the most notable differences is that the meaning of the vision is not self-evident and is therefore explained by the Lord. A second difference is that Amos does not intercede for the nation in these next visions which probably reflects his realization that given the condition of Israel, judgment must occur.¹⁶⁴

A key interpretive issue in this vision surrounds the meaning of the word translated "plumb line" from which two major viewpoints have emerged. The word translated "plumb line" occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. It is not a Hebrew word but an Akkadian word which was the language spoken by the Assyrians. In Amos 7:7-8 the word occurs four times. Chisholm summarizes the interpretive issue as he writes, "Traditionally it was taken to mean "lead," suggesting that a plumb line, to which a lead weight was attached, was in view. But recent research seems to indicate that the word refers to "tin," not lead."¹⁶⁵

According to the traditional interpretation, the Lord with a plumb line in His hand is standing beside a wall that was built with a plumb line, meaning that the wall was plumb, i.e. straight up and down. While the wall, which represents Israel, was built

¹⁶⁴ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 397.

¹⁶⁵ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 397.

plumb something has happened and the wall is no longer plumb. It is leaning and is about to fall which reflects that Israel has not been living according to God's standards.

For this reason, God must bring judgment upon Israel.

The second major viewpoint understands that the word should be translated "tin."

The construction of these verses should then read,

(7) This is what he showed me: The Lord stood upon [or "beside"] a wall of tin, with tin in his hand. (8) The Lord said to me, 'What do you see Amos?' I replied, 'Tin'. Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am placing tin in the midst of my people Israel. I will no longer spare them.'¹⁶⁶

The key issue to be addressed in this rendering of the passage is the meaning of "tin." In other words, "What does the tin symbolize?" One suggestion is that tin signifies weakness and vulnerability. In Ancient Near Eastern literature walls were made of metal, generally iron or bronze, which speaks of strength. In the call of Jeremiah, Yahweh announced special protection for the prophet promising to make him a "fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls."¹⁶⁷ Again, with the prophet Ezekiel, God used imagery to depict the siege of Jerusalem that included an "iron wall."¹⁶⁸ In each of these cases the elements used in these walls were strong and hard. Tin, on the other hand, speaks of Israel's weakness or vulnerability and her susceptibility in an attack.¹⁶⁹

A second significance of "tin" is espoused by Niehaus. He understands that the wall of metal symbolizes great military strength. Since this word for "tin" is drawn from the Akkadian language spoken by the Assyrians, he affirms a strong relationship in these

¹⁶⁶ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 397.

¹⁶⁷ Jeremiah 1:18.

¹⁶⁸ Ezekiel 4:3.

¹⁶⁹ Paul, *Amos*, 235.

verses between "tin" and the Assyrians. In a few years the Lord was going to use the Assyrians to punish Israel and since there is no intercession by Amos in this vision, the judgment is certain. The Lord is positioned above the wall of tin and as such it could indicate that He is over the Assyrian Empire who will be His agent in bringing judgment upon Israel. The tin which is in His hand symbolizes the power of the Assyrians.¹⁷⁰

Regardless of which interpretive viewpoint is embraced, they both depict future judgment that was to fall on the nation of Israel. The focus of the judgment is twofold, namely, the nation's worship centers and the ruling king's dynasty (7:9). Israel's worship centers will be destroyed and all of the religious sites in Israel will be impacted.¹⁷¹ The "high places" refer to "shrines on the hills in the open country" and the "sanctuaries were temples usually located in cities such as in Bethel and Dan."¹⁷² Regardless of where Israel worshipped, their worship was corrupt and as a result their places of worship would be destroyed.

The second aspect of God's judgment would fall on the ruling house of Jeroboam II, the dynasty of the northern kingdom. This prophecy was fulfilled in 752 B.C. when Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II, was assassinated.¹⁷³

This two-fold judgment described in Amos 7:9 corresponds with the words found in Leviticus 26:30-33 spoken years earlier, "And I will destroy your high places and ... I will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will unsheathe the sword after you ..."

The absence of intercession by Amos on behalf of the nation is distinctive

¹⁷⁰ Niehaus, *Amos*, 456.

¹⁷¹ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 133.

¹⁷² Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 133.

¹⁷³ 2 Kings 15:8-10.

compared with the two previous visions possibly suggesting that this future judgment was certain.

Amos' Confrontation With Amaziah The Priest At Bethel 7:10-17

There is a break in the flow between visions three and four as Amos includes an autobiographical account of his exchange with Amaziah the Priest. This exchange demonstrates the existing opposition from the spiritual leadership to the prophet and the word of God. As a result, it highlights why God's judgment must come upon His people.

This exchange between Amaziah and the prophet Amos will be considered under three headings namely, Amaziah's report to the king (7:10-11), Amaziah's charge to Amos (7:12-13) followed by Amos' response to Amaziah (7:14-17).

Amaziah, who was probably the high priest at Bethel and appointed by king Jeroboam, relayed a report to the king indicating that the nation could no longer handle the words of the prophet. His report is partially correct but also incorrect. It is correct inasmuch as Amos has announced that Israel will go into exile (7:11b). However, the intimation that Amos was a personal enemy of Jeroboam and was actively conspiring against him was incorrect (7:10-11).¹⁷⁴ Amos was simply being faithful to discharge the message commissioned to him by God.

As Amaziah confronted Amos he indicated that he should return to his own country and make his living there; a charge that implied he was motivated to prophesy for monetary gain. By stating that Bethel was a royal sanctuary he was reminding Amos that the state religion was under the direct control of the king, and therefore Amos needed to

¹⁷⁴ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 136.

respect that reality (7:12-13).

Amos, emboldened by God, provided a direct response to Amaziah. He affirmed that he was a prophet by Divine call. He was not a professionally trained prophet; i.e. he was not on the payroll of the king. He indicated that he was not a prophet by birth. His father was not a prophet and therefore Amos was not following in the vocational footsteps of his earthly father as was Jewish custom. Also, he was not a prophet by formal training because he was a sheep breeder and grower of sycamore figs. However, God had called him and he therefore had no option but to speak God's words, whether Amaziah approved or not.

Amos further demonstrated his authoritative prophetic calling from God by prophesying a three-fold judgment directly against Amaziah and his family (7:16-17). He announced that Amaziah's wife would become a prostitute (7:17a) and his sons and daughters would die by the sword thereby bringing the dynasty of Amaziah to an end just as Jeroboam II's would be brought to an end (7:17b).¹⁷⁵ Finally, Amaziah would go into exile and die in an unclean land (7:17c) which would have been especially offensive to a priest with heightened sensitivity to matters of cleanness and uncleanness. Amos ended the encounter by announcing that Israel would indeed go into exile (7:17d).

The Vision Of The Summer Fruit 8:1-14

After the exchange with Amaziah, Amos resumed reporting the visions with the fourth vision introduced by the words "this is what the Lord GOD showed me" (8:1a). The fourth vision consisted of a basket of summer fruit also rendered "ripe fruit" (8:1b)

¹⁷⁵ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 399.

which fit with the Lord's explanation that "the end has come upon my people Israel" (8:2).¹⁷⁶ Chisholm suggests that there is a play on words between "ripe" and the "end."¹⁷⁷ God's people were ripe for the judgment that was now inevitable as reflected in the words, "I will never again pass by them" (8:2).

As a result of their judgment a time of celebration will be turned to mourning; a kind of mourning that occurs in the face of a catastrophe (8:3a).¹⁷⁸ The ensuing destruction will be so severe and the corpses so numerous, the bodies will not be given proper treatment or attention (8:3b). The command of "silence" possibly conveys the sense of being overwhelmed so that silence is the only fitting response or silence might be invoked so as to avoid any further attack by the enemy (8:3c).

The three-fold cause accounting for God's severe judgment is provided in 8:4-6. First of all, Israel is guilty of social injustices as they oppress the poor (8:4, 6a). Secondly, the nation is guilty of hypocritical worship (8:5a). For Israel, religion is fine providing it does not interfere with their business bottom line but they despise the regulations, such as the festival days and the Sabbath, that impact their ability to make money. Thirdly, Israel is guilty of corrupt business practices motivated by materialistic greed (8:5b, 6). Their dishonesty is portrayed in their use of dishonest scales and measurements in their transactions whereby they take advantage of the poor. This paragraph of 8:4-6 is a miniature of the book of Amos as it highlights Israel's three major sins, namely, social injustice, hypocritical worship and materialism.

¹⁷⁶ NIV renders the term ripe fruit whereas ESV translates it summer fruit.

¹⁷⁷ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 399.

¹⁷⁸ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 143.

The impact of the judgment will be great as conveyed in 8:7-14. To confirm the certainty of the judgment the Lord swears by the "pride of Jacob" affirming that He will not forget their deeds (8:7). Some understand the expression "pride of Jacob" as a reference to Yahweh being the pride of Jacob and herein the Lord is swearing by Himself.¹⁷⁹ Others understand that the Lord is employing sarcasm. Since oaths are sworn by that which is unalterable, it means that the Lord is swearing quite literally by Israel's pride.¹⁸⁰ Elsewhere in Amos, the "pride of Jacob" refers to Israel's attitude of self reliance or self confidence which the Lord is here affirming to be constant.¹⁸¹

The consequences of the Lord's certain judgment are both severe and pervasive as indicated by the rhetorical questions in 8:8. The land will quake being overwhelmed in fear because of the judgment (8:8).¹⁸² Such acts of social injustice, hypocritical worship, and materialistic greed create destructive consequential waves in life and society just as the flooding Nile River created destructive, adverse circumstances.¹⁸³ The flooding Nile with its devastating results is an apt analogy for Israel's future judgment when the Assyrians would flood the land leaving in its wake devastating losses with Israel being overcome.¹⁸⁴ The analogy of an eclipse whereby darkness suddenly overtakes the bright day sun depicts the doom and destruction of the judgment (8:9) and mirrors the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28:29.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ The NIV capitalizes "Pride" which would be consistent with this viewpoint.

¹⁸⁰ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 400.

¹⁸¹ Amos 6:8.

¹⁸² Cf. Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 147 where it is acknowledged that the trembling could be a reference to an earthquake but it is most likely a reference to people being filled with fear at the realization that God will not forget anything they have done.

¹⁸³ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 148.

¹⁸⁴ Niehaus, *Amos*, 472.

¹⁸⁵ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 400.

In contrast to the celebration and joyous spirit of religious festivals there will be sorrow and intense mourning; the kind of mourning appropriate for when one loses their son (8:10). Finally, the greatest consequence of all will be that the prophetic voice of God will be silent (8:11-14). Just as people intensely look for water and food during a time of famine, so these idolatrous worshipers will search and long for the word of God travelling throughout the breadth of the land but they will not find it (8:11-12).¹⁸⁶ Even the strongest and most fit of their generation, those who are the future of the nation, "the lovely virgins and the young men" will not survive this spiritual famine (8:13).¹⁸⁷

Israel, who swears not by the name of the God to whom they belong but rather by their worship centers (8:14) will discover that their confidence in these worship practices have been ill-placed. Bethel, here referred to as Samaria, and Dan were the places where Jeroboam I established a golden calf thereby establishing worship centers at both the northern and southern part of the kingdom.¹⁸⁸ Beersheba was a place of pilgrimage.¹⁸⁹

The significance of this verse is captured as Niehaus writes,

The Lord announces the end of idolatry in Israel. The "shame" of Samaria (presumably its Asherah worship), the golden calf at Dan, the pilgrimage route to Beer-sheba – all these will come to an end, for the people who gave them meaning shall fall by the Lord's judgment and never rise again.¹⁹⁰

Tragically, Israel has previously rejected the word of the Lord (2:11-12), Amaziah has

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 330-331 Wolff argues that the expression in 8:12 is designed to portray the roaming in the most far-reaching way and the expression should therefore be understood as "the uttermost boundaries of the earth as in Psalms 72:8 and Zechariah 9:10."

¹⁸⁷ Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 228.

¹⁸⁸ 1 Kings 12:28-29.

¹⁸⁹ Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 228. Cf. also Niehaus, *Amos*, 476 and Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 332.

¹⁹⁰ Niehaus, *Amos*, 476.

tried to silence the prophet (7:12-13, 16) and now when the people try to seek God's word it will be too late! "Those who refused to hear the prophetic word ... are punished by that very word being withheld from them."¹⁹¹

The Vision Depicting Judgment At The Worship Center 9:1-10

Amos introduced this fifth vision in a distinctive manner. The introductory words of the previous four visions are "This is what the Lord showed me" (7:1,4,7; 8:1) whereas Amos states here, "I saw the Lord standing beside the altar" (9:1a). This is just one of several differences in the makeup of this vision. One such difference is that Amos has no verbal participation; he is just the recipient of the message from God. Smith states, "There is a progression of the Lord's control in the visions and a receding of Amos's involvement. In the first pair of visions Amos spoke more than the Lord; in the second pair Amos spoke only a word or two; here Amos is silent. The Lord's words dominate the report."¹⁹²

In this vision the Lord is standing beside the altar. While it is commonly held that the unidentified altar is the one at the sanctuary in Bethel which housed the golden calf, Stuart acknowledges that the altar can be symbolic since the previous four visions have included symbols.¹⁹³ What is clear is that a worship center is in view. The altar is especially important inasmuch as it was the one place and the one means that God had appointed whereby God's people could approach Him.¹⁹⁴ Instead of the worship center

¹⁹¹ Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 330.

¹⁹² Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 154.

¹⁹³ Andersen and Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 835; Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 401; Niehaus, *Amos*, 479; Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 401; Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 338; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 391.

¹⁹⁴ Leviticus 16.

being a place of hope and security it is the object of God's judgment as He gives command to "Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people" (9:1b). Possibilities for who the command is directed to include the prophet while others suggest it must be an angel given the enormity of the destructive act.¹⁹⁵ Still, others link the verb "strike" with an earthquake, and if this is the case then God is the one who executes the command.¹⁹⁶

With the support structure attacked, including the pillar and the base of the door posts, the building would collapse on the worshipers.¹⁹⁷ The destruction will be thorough as any who survive the crumbling structure will not ultimately escape (9:1c-4). Five hypothetical means of escape are highlighted in order to emphasize the inescapability of the judgment. Hiding in Sheol, the abiding place of the dead, would be no more effective than if one were to ascend to heaven and dwell in God's abiding place (9:2). If one were to hide out in the lush vegetation on top of Mount Carmel, even there God will search them out (9:3a). Or if they hide in the bottom parts of the sea, the place where some believed the forces of evil rule, God will demonstrate that He is sovereign even there and will have a poisonous snake bite them (9:3b). Finally, if they go into captivity and leave the land where "God lives," God will demonstrate that He is everywhere present and will have them killed in a foreign land (9:4). His eyes are set on them, not for favor but for judgment and there is no place where they can escape His presence.

In the hymn which follows, Amos affirms that the Israelites will not escape God's

¹⁹⁵ Paul, *Amos*, 274; Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 229; Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 401.

¹⁹⁶ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 154.

¹⁹⁷ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 154-155.

judgment because their judge is the Sovereign One (9:5-6). Amos included hymns elsewhere in his prophecy following strong words of judgment just as he also does here.¹⁹⁸ "The theme of each hymn is the Lord's creative nature, His power over nature and, by implication, over events in Israel. Each of the three hymns has been placed strategically by the author to illustrate the sovereignty of God in the midst of judgment."¹⁹⁹ This hymn which is "a picture of a theophany appearance of the majestic glory of God" portrays Him as the warrior God whose powerful acts of judgment can impact all of creation.²⁰⁰ The land responds to the Lord's touch, which results in an earthquake, in the way that the Nile responds to a flood; it rises and abates in accordance with the Lord's control (9:5).²⁰¹ Such is the Lord's power. This One who inhabits both heaven and earth is the One who controls all of nature causing it to rain as He gives command to the waters of the sea (9:6).

Having established the Lord's sovereignty over all things he affirms that He is sovereign over all nations. Israel had concluded that their unique relationship with Yahweh exempted them from God's judgment. The Lord however highlights how Israel is also similar to other nations. Just as God had delivered Israel from Egypt so also, He had brought other people from one geographical area and had established them in another; such was the case with Cush, the Philistines and Syria. The striking difference between Israel and these other nations however, is that God entered into a special covenant relationship with her. As a result of this great privilege, greater responsibilities

¹⁹⁸ Amos 4:13; 5:8-9; 8:8.

¹⁹⁹ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 158.

²⁰⁰ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 402; Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 401.

²⁰¹ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 158.

belonged to them. However, because of Israel's unfaithfulness, the Lord now indicated that she was no different than the Cushites, "the accursed descendants of Ham" as she would now be judged.²⁰² Earlier in his prophecy Amos indicated that the Philistines were going to be judged for their sins and the people of Aram (Syria) who came from Kir were going to be sent back to Kir.²⁰³ So also God's judgment will now fall upon Israel. However, a remnant will be preserved (9:8) through a sifting that will separate the righteous from the wicked (9:9-10) as Niehaus affirms in the following quote.

Perhaps he compares himself to a harvester, who takes grain into a sieve and shakes it. The worthless bits of stone and rubbish remain in the sieve; the good grain falls to the earth. So the Lord will put his people through the sieve. He will bind the wicked destroying them (v10), but he will save the righteous. This principle of God's justice is eternal: the judgment of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous go together.²⁰⁴

For Israel's arrogant who believe they are invincible and exempt from God's judgment, they will perish by the sword (9:10).

The Promise Of Restoration And Blessing: A Better Day Is Coming 9:11-15

The final section of the book of Amos is so markedly different from the rest of the book that some commentators have concluded it to be the work of a later editor instead of Amos.²⁰⁵ However, the difference in subject matter, restoration versus judgment, reasonably accounts for the different tone. Also, it is not fair to conclude that Amos is only permitted to be a spokesman of doom and cannot also deliver a message of hope.²⁰⁶

²⁰² Niehaus, *Amos*, 486.

²⁰³ Amos 1:5-8.

²⁰⁴ Niehaus, *Amos*, 486.

²⁰⁵ Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 116-20 provides an excellent summary of this discussion and includes a listing of various authors and the position they take on this issue.

²⁰⁶ Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos*, 119.

Additionally, it would be distinctive if Amos did not contain a salvation oracle as each of the prophetic books are characterized by this two-fold subject matter, namely judgment and restoration.

Summary Statement For 9:11-15

Amos through two salvation oracles announced a time of future blessing and restoration that focused on promises regarding the Davidic kingdom and the land of Israel. The two sections of this restoration passage are marked by the phrases "in that day" (9:11) and "Behold days are coming" (9:13). While the coming day is not specified it will be a time when God will graciously act on behalf of His people pouring out His blessings upon them.

First Salvation Message 9:11-12

Amos prophesied concerning a future day when the Davidic kingdom would be restored, strengthened and blessed. Each of the distinctive elements of a salvation message are found within this oracle. The *messenger formula* is found in the words, "declares the LORD who does this" (9:12b) while the *reassurance* is found in the phrase, "in that day" (9:11a). The *future transformation* is found in the kingdom promises associated with the restored Davidic kingdom and its resulting impact on the nations which the Lord will fulfill in that future day (9:11b-12a).

Several promises are given in 9:11 relating to the restoration of the Davidic kingdom here referred to as the "booth of David." The first promise, "I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen" raises the questions, "What is David's tent or booth?" and

"In what way was it fallen?"²⁰⁷ Most interpreters hold that David's booth or tent speaks of the "Davidic rule or some aspect of it."²⁰⁸ The Davidic dynasty is probably in view which in 2 Samuel 7:5-16 is referred to as David's house. As McComiskey states, "The word "tent" (*sukkāh*) refers to a rude shelter (a "hut") and pictures the "house" of David that was becoming a dilapidated shack; in Amos's time the Davidic dynasty had fallen so low that it could no longer be called a house."²⁰⁹ The commentator Paul argues that the reference to the tent being fallen is not a reference to the fall of Judah to the Babylonians in 587/6 B.C. Rather, it refers to the state of the Davidic empire, which as a result of the kingdom dividing, had become "a dilapidated, unstable, precarious state of affairs."²¹⁰ However, this state of affairs would change because the Lord "will repair its breaches and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old." These promises reflect that the unity of the kingdom would be experienced once again as the Lord revives the Davidic dynasty and reunites the two kingdoms into one which is promised several times in the prophets.²¹¹ Amos is here in alignment with a theme throughout the prophetic books that the Davidic dynasty will be perpetuated through the coming of the Messiah, David's greater Son.²¹²

This revitalization and strengthening of the Davidic dynasty will include the remnant of Edom and the nations (9:12). Some understand that in the restored Davidic kingdom nations and peoples, who were formerly under Davidic control, will be subject

²⁰⁷ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 165.

²⁰⁸ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 165.

²⁰⁹ Thomas E. McComiskey, *Amos*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1985), 329.

²¹⁰ Paul, *Amos*, 290.

²¹¹ Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:10-14; Hosea 1:11; 3:5.

²¹² Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 33:15, 17; Micah 5:2.

to the Davidic empire once again. Chisholm writes,

The Lord had made Edom and the other nations subject to David's rule (see 2 Sam. 8:1-14; 10:1-19; 1 Kings 11:15), but when the kingdom divided, they were eventually able to regain their independence (see, for example, 2 Kings 8:20-22). However, the revived house of David would conquer all these nations and reestablish the Davidic empire.²¹³

Another viewpoint holds that what is in view here is not a military subjugation of people but rather an understanding that the restored Davidic kingdom will be inclusive of both Gentiles and Jews. In Acts 15 when the early church leaders convened the Jerusalem Council the theological tension concerned how Gentile converts should be received into the church. James appealed to Amos 9:11-12 in order to argue that the Old Testament foresaw a time when Gentile believers would be included in the community of God's people. He contended that what was happening in the early days of the church was fulfilling this Old Testament prophecy of Amos.

One of the key interpretive issues in Amos 9:12 relates to how the verse should be translated. The Old Testament translation follows the Masoretic text whereas Acts 15 follows the translation of the Septuagint (LXX). The LXX changes the word "possess" to "seek" and changes the word "Edom" to "the remnant of men." It renders the verse to mean that in a future day God's work in restoring the Davidic kingdom will prompt the nations to seek Him, as it states "the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by my name."²¹⁴ Both renderings, the Hebrew text as well as the Septuagint, envision Gentile inclusion in a future day when the Davidic kingdom is restored.

²¹³ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 402.

²¹⁴ Acts 15:17.

Second Salvation Message

The second salvation oracle pertains to the land as Amos prophesies blessings regarding its fertility, repopulation and possession (9:13-15). These blessings will unfold during a special period of time, indicated by the phrase "behold the days are coming." During this time the land will become very fertile yielding abundant crops (9:13). Amos employs hyperbole to depict this amazing time of blessing. Those who plow the fields in preparation for the next planting season will catch up and overtake those who are still gathering the produce from the most recent harvest. The greatness of the crops will be so overwhelming that it will challenge their ability to collect it. Similarly, the grape harvest will be so abundant that it will not yet be finished when it comes time to plant again later in the fall. The yield will be so abundant that grape juice will stream down the hillsides as the vats overflow.²¹⁵

In addition to the fertile crops, the land will be repopulated (9:14). God will return His people to the land following the destruction and exile.²¹⁶ They will rebuild their cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and enjoy the produce. They will plant new crops and harvest them. These promises stand in contrast to the earlier judgments in Amos indicating they would build homes but not dwell in them, plant vineyards but not enjoy the fruits of them.²¹⁷ These restoration promises represent a profound reversal of covenant curses pronounced earlier upon Israel.

Finally, the land will once again be their possession and they will never again be

²¹⁵ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 404; Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 414.

²¹⁶ Amos 5:27; 7:17.

²¹⁷ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 414.

taken from it (9:15). This promise is the opposite of the immediate future that faces the northern kingdom as they were about to be sent into captivity.

These promises would have been an enormous encouragement to the small remnant of faithful followers of Yahweh. The messenger formula, "declares the LORD" (9:13a) and "says the LORD your God" (9:15b), found at the beginning and conclusion of the oracle provided the assurance that these promises would be performed.

Regarding the fulfillment of these restoration promises there is a breadth of perspectives. Perspectives range from affirming that aspects of fulfillment occurred during the return from the Babylonian captivity, some elements are currently being fulfilled in the church and while still others await fulfillment in a future day with the Lord's return. Smith writes,

Although the postexilic community experienced a partial fulfillment of such promises as are made in 9:11-15, their ultimate fulfillment awaited New Testament times. Jesus Christ in the line of David was the manifestation of God at work to change the word of wrath to the word of mercy. He founded the church, a God-blessed people, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). He charged them to make disciples of "all the nations." This part of the promise (Amos 9:12) is in process of fulfillment. The text, with its first-person verbs referring to God's actions, makes clear that God is the one who restores, builds, plants and blesses. It will not be by political coup, social revolution, or military maneuvers that Israel will regain its ascendancy. It will be by the coming of the Lord, who will heal his people and their land.²¹⁸

Niehaus further states,

This promise was not fulfilled after the exile, however, since the Jewish rejection of Christ brought about yet another exile, which has only recently been ended by the creation of the modern Israeli state. But even the present form of the nation Israel does not fulfill the prophecy, although it anticipates its fulfillment. Israel is still in spiritual exile from her Lord and will be until its blindness is removed (2 Cor. 3:13-15). We eagerly anticipate that removal. For, as Paul says, "if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life

²¹⁸ Billy Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 170.

from the dead!" (Rom. 11:15). The dry bones have been revived and given flesh. We now await the in breathing of the Spirit. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!²¹⁹

The prophecy of Amos concludes on this optimistic note of restoration which celebrates that "God is still sovereign over the affairs of his people and will faithfully fulfill everything he has promised to their forefathers. It will happen in spite of the failures of the people in Amos's day and in spite of the failures of the church today. God's love is gracious beyond measure and his power to transform is unlimited."²²⁰

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a summary exegesis of the prophecy of Amos. The context of the ministry of Amos has been summarized which is key to understanding the particular emphases the prophet develops in his book.

²¹⁹ Niehaus, *Amos*, 494.

²²⁰ Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 414.

CHAPTER THREE

A REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT ESSENTIAL TO PREACHING THE MINOR PROPHETS

This chapter will include a broader discussion of the prophetic office and the ministry of the prophets including a summary of each of the minor prophetic books excluding Amos. Additionally, consideration will be given to a discussion of the importance of biblical literary genre and the key features of prophetic genre in particular.

Prophets And Prophetism In Israel

There is discussion concerning when prophetism officially commenced in Israel. While Samuel is referred to as the last of the judges and the first of the prophets thereby providing a bridge between the theocracy and the monarchy, it is clear that others prior to Samuel were described as prophets.¹ These include such personalities as Enoch, Abraham, Miriam, Moses, Eldad, Medad and the Seventy as well as others.² It is clear however from Deuteronomy 18 that the office and ministry of prophet as conferred on Moses marked a distinctive beginning for Israel. The uniqueness of Moses as prophet is reflected not only in that God spoke with him face to face but also because his example was adopted as a template or prototype for subsequent messengers of God occupying the office of prophet.³

¹ Willem A. VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 34-35. See also Acts 3:24; 13:20.

² Jude 14; Genesis 20:7; Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:1-8; Deuteronomy 34:10; Numbers 11:24-29; cf. also William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 224.

³ Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 18:9-22.

Grouping The Prophets

The collection of prophets found in the Old Testament can be considered in various groupings. A common division divides the prophets between the premonarchy and monarchy period. Within the monarchy prophets a further distinction is made between the non-literary or oral prophets versus the writing or literary prophets.⁴ Sometimes this grouping is also referred to as non-classical versus classical prophets. The literary or classical prophets are recognized as those which have biblical books which bear their name and it is generally this group of people with which the term "prophets" is associated.⁵

The Non-literary Or Pre-Classical Prophets

The non-literary prophets frequently served in the earlier stages of the monarchy, during the united and early part of the divided kingdom, and their primary focus or audience was the king and the royal officials. Such prophets included people like Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, Micaiah, Huldah, etc. Their ministry to the king included providing counsel on various matters like whether to engage in military battles or authorization for building a temple.⁶ Frequently it involved challenging the king's sinful behavior and warning him of the impending consequences. Their ministry entailed an oral delivery of God's word. While in some instances parts of their ministry were recorded, when this

⁴ Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 120-122.

⁵ The designations non-writing and writing is not absolute inasmuch as Samuel is considered part of the non-writing prophets yet has books which bear his name. Other prophets in the period of the writing prophets exist such as Uriah in Jeremiah 26:20-23 who have no book named after them. Nevertheless, these categories, while not perfect, are used as matters of convenience. See also LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament*, 226; Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, 126-127.

⁶ 1 Kings 22:13-28; 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

occurred, it was done by others and never by the prophets themselves.⁷

The Literary Or Classical Prophets

A major distinctive of the classical prophets in comparison to the earlier prophets is their targeted audience. The literary prophets focused their attention on the people as opposed to the king and the royal court. Messages still got delivered to the kings but the prophets' overarching focus was addressing the people with their message.⁸ In addition to their oracular ministry their messages got recorded which provided subsequent audiences or generations with a record of God's revelation to the people. Regarding how their messages got recorded, sometimes it was done by the prophets themselves as the Lord instructed them to write the message down, while sometimes a scribe compiled the written record as was the case with Baruch for Jeremiah.⁹ Additionally, it is believed that disciples of certain prophets collected the works of the prophets and compiled them into books.¹⁰ These written records expanded the reach of the prophets' ministry as a broader audience including future generations were able to learn of God's revelation to His people.¹¹

Organizing The Literary Prophets

There are numerous ways in which the writing prophets can be organized or

⁷ Consider for example Nathan's exchange with King David as recorded in 2 Samuel and the ministry of Elijah and Elisha as found in the books of Kings.

⁸ For example, consider Jeremiah and his several interactions with Zedekiah (Jeremiah 27:1-15; 37:1-10, 17-21). Also, consider Isaiah and his communications with King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3-13) and King Hezekiah (37:2-7, 21-35; 38:1-8; 39:3-8).

⁹ Isaiah 8:16; Jeremiah 36:2; Daniel 12:4; Jeremiah 36:4-6.

¹⁰ Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 347.

¹¹ LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament*, 227.

grouped together. The most familiar grouping of the prophets is the designation of "major" versus "minor" prophets which comes from Latin terms assigned to these books centuries ago. The terms "minor" and "major" reflects the reality that certain books are shorter and longer respectively, and it is not a commentary that some books are more or less significant than the others.¹² The major prophets consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah (Lamentations), Ezekiel and Daniel while the Minor Prophets refer to the remainder of the prophetic books also referred to as "The Twelve."

The prophets can also be grouped according to the time in which they ministered. The time period when the literary prophets ministered extends from the eighth or ninth century through to the fifth century or from approximately 800 B.C. to 450 B.C.¹³ Within this time framework the prophets are not evenly spread throughout the centuries but instead they appear at key times and generally in times of crises or when the threat of a crisis looms. These threats will be discussed further when consideration is given to the "Historical and Geopolitical Context of the Prophets." The Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom of Judah was a major historical event in Israel's Old Testament history and the prophets can be allocated in accordance with how their ministry relates to the exile. This three-fold division is known as the Pre-exilic, Exilic and Post-exilic prophets.

¹² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 181.

¹³ It is commonly held that Amos is the earliest writing prophet prophesying in the eighth century although there are those who defend a ninth century date for Obadiah and Joel. See Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, 262-264 and Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Warsaw, IN: Faith Ministries & Publications, 1983), 140-141 and Arnold and Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, 348.

Table 1: The Relationship Of The Babylonian Exile To The Ministry Of The Prophets

The Prophets and The Babylonian Exile		
Pre-Exilic Prophets	Exilic Prophets	Post-Exilic Prophets
Obadiah	Daniel	Haggai
Joel	Ezekiel	Zechariah
Jonah		Malachi
Amos		
Hosea		
Isaiah		
Micah		
Nahum		
Zephaniah		
Habakkuk		
Jeremiah		

The Minor Prophets can also be grouped according to the people to whom they prophesied which closely relates to the historical context in which they lived. Amos and Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in advance of the Assyrian captivity. Several prophesied to the Southern Kingdom of Judah prior to the Babylonian captivity including Joel, Micah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah.¹⁴ Three prophets directed their prophecies to individual nations, namely Obadiah, Jonah and Nahum. Obadiah's prophecy focused on Edom while Jonah and Nahum prophesied concerning Nineveh, the

¹⁴ Micah as well as Isaiah, prophesied to the northern kingdom but also to the southern kingdom.

capital city of Assyria. Finally, there were those who prophesied to the remnant who had returned from captivity to the land of Palestine, namely Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Table 2: The Prophets And The Primary Nations Addressed

The Prophets and Their Primary National Focus			
Israel	Judah	Edom	Nineveh
Amos	Joel	Obadiah	Jonah
Hosea	Isaiah		Nahum
	Micah		
	Zephaniah		
	Habakkuk		
	Jeremiah		
	Daniel		
	Ezekiel		
	Haggai		
	Zechariah		
	Malachi		

Key Features Of The Minor Prophetic Books

There are a number of features which generally characterize the prophets and their prophetic books especially those whose ministries were directed to either Israel or Judah.

Central Elements Of The Prophet's Message

Three typical elements comprise the prophet's overarching message including the following: 1. Israel/Judah you have violated the covenant; 2. The failure to repent will result in judgment; 3. There is a promise of hope and future restoration for both Israel and

Judah and the nations because God is committed to fulfilling His promises.¹⁵

The Prophets And The Covenant

Each of the above elements is linked with Yahweh's covenant with Israel which constitutes the foundation upon which the ministry of the prophets is based. It is affirmed that this emphasis on the covenant is one of the important distinctions between the classical prophets and the prophets of the Ancient Near East since the foreign nations had no parallel type covenant arrangement with their gods.¹⁶ For the prophets of Yahweh the covenant themes permeate their message as is affirmed in the following statement.

The shadow of Mt. Sinai, with its covenant law, tinges everything the prophets say. A prophecy is God's message to the people and the leaders who rule them in God's place. It is a message of judgment because God's people are constantly in need of correction. At the same time, it is a message of hope, for Yahweh has not broken his covenant and will complete his redemptive task when the inescapable judgment has run its course.¹⁷

The Mosaic covenant which Yahweh established with His people and explained in Deuteronomy forms a major theological backdrop to the ministry of the prophets. As summarized in Deuteronomy 28-30 obedience to God, as exemplified in covenant faithfulness, assured God's people of His blessing while disobedience would result in them experiencing God's covenant curses. As a result, the prophets were consistently challenging the people of God to covenant faithfulness and warning them of the

¹⁵ Hays describes the prophets who include all three of these elements as the "Standard Exilic Prophets" which include Amos, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. This three-fold inclusion is not found in the prophets who address individual foreign nations, namely Obadiah, Jonah and Nahum because no covenant relationship was established with these nations. See J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 63, 69, 71. Compare also Arnold and Beyer's description of the general characteristics found in the "classical prophets" in *Encountering the Old Testament*, 341.

¹⁶ Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 506-507.

¹⁷ LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament*, 229.

consequences of persistent disobedience. With respect to the covenant violations of the people of God the prophets regularly addressed three major problems. These include idolatry, social injustices and ritualistic/hypocritical worship.¹⁸ These subjects will be discussed further when consideration is given to "The Spiritual Problems" facing the prophet Amos and God's people.

The Day Of The Lord

The Day of the Lord is a key concept addressed by the prophets and it is a day which has implications for both God's people and the nations. It will be a time when God's people experience judgment from God for their covenant unfaithfulness and it will also be a time when they will experience blessing and future restoration. During the Day of the Lord the nations will frequently be employed by God as His agents or instruments in inflicting judgment upon God's people. However, in a twist of irony, those same nations will subsequently be the recipients of God's judgment because of the manner in which they treated God's people. There is also in the Day of the Lord a time of future blessing for those nations who in repentance turn to the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is frequently characterized by a two-fold perspective. There is the near view reality and the future eschatological perspective. At times the prophecies of judgment in the Day of the Lord refer to an imminent event for Israel and Judah while at other times it is a reference to a future, eschatological judgment.¹⁹ Related to this two-fold perspective, VanGemeren writes, "He has reserved a day for judgment and wrath on all ungodliness. This means that the intrusions of God's judgment in time – such as the

¹⁸ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 64.

¹⁹ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 80-82.

fall of Samaria, Jerusalem, and Babylon – are significant foreshadowings of his final day of vengeance when he will fully establish his kingdom on this earth."²⁰

The events which transpire in the Day of the Lord underscore the prophet's thematic message that God is sovereign and holds all peoples, including His covenant people, accountable for their actions. It is in His sovereign control to execute judgment and in grace to pour out blessing and salvation.

The Historical And Geopolitical Context Of The Minor Prophets: A Summary

During the time of the writing prophets three major world powers, namely, Assyria, Babylon and Persia dominated the geopolitical landscape of the Ancient Near East.²¹ Each of these three nations was to the north of Israel. Assyria and Babylon occupied the area today identified as Iraq while Persia is linked with modern day Iran.²² Egypt located south of Israel, was the dominant southern power.²³

Petersen provides a helpful summary when he writes that during the time of Amos, whom he regards as the earliest of the twelve Minor Prophets,

Israel and Judah lay on the western perimeter of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Late in the seventh century, that Mesopotamian power fell to another, the Neo-Babylonians. Then, midway through the sixth century, Persia, an empire with its roots to the east of Mesopotamia, decimated the Babylonians. Each of these empires at one time or another placed troops in Syria-Palestine. Life in both Israel and Judah was thus, in considerable measure, a function of foreign imperial activity. The Neo-Assyrian empire destroyed Israel in 721, the Neo-Babylonian Empire destroyed Judah in 587, and the Persian Empire allowed for and funded partially the rebuilding of Judah as a province within the empire. Each of these three nodal moments receives attention in the Twelve.²⁴

²⁰ VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 45.

²¹ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 34; Arnold and Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, 348.

²² See Appendix C of this Thesis-Project for a map of the Bible lands today.

²³ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 34.

²⁴ David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 171.

Table 3: Dominant Empires And The Ministry Of The Prophets

The Prophets and Associated Dominant Empires		
Assyrian Dominance (745 - 612 BC)	Babylonian Dominance (612 - 539 BC)	Persian Dominance (539 - 336 BC)
Amos	Jeremiah*	Daniel
Jonah	Zephaniah	Zechariah
Hosea	Habakkuk	Haggai
Isaiah	Ezekiel	Malachi
Micah	Daniel	
Nahum	Joel (?)	
Joel (?)		
*Jeremiah actually began his ministry in 626 BC, during the twilight years of the Assyrian Empire, but most of his book is to be understood in light of the rising Babylonian Empire. Also keep in mind that 612 BC (the fall of Nineveh) is an approximate date for the shift from Assyrian to Babylonian dominance. In reality, this shift took place over a number of years. ²⁵		

Each of these dominant empires impacted the people of God and provided an important context for the ministry of the respective prophets. Also, within the various shifts in power there were several other nations who played key roles at certain times. Military victories and defeats, numerous alliances to resist the various expansionist aspirations of the dominant empire, were all a part of the geopolitical context. Knowing the historical context of the time in which the prophet prophesied helps the preacher better appreciate the challenges God's messengers faced in communicating their message. Consideration will now be given to an overview of each of these empires.

²⁵ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 35.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire And The Minor Prophets (ca. 900-612 B.C.)²⁶

The Neo-Assyrian empire extends from c. 900-612 B.C. and is important to the biblical landscape, in which some of the prophets ministered, particularly from the latter part of the eighth to the seventh century when the empire reached its zenith.²⁷ Prior to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian empire, Assyria had experienced a decline following the death of Tiglath-Pileser I (1116-1076).²⁸ During this time the Syrians in the west were able to establish a kingdom with a center in Damascus and were also able to exert pressure on the borders of Assyria.²⁹ However, Assyria rose to prominence again during the rule of a series of individuals beginning with Ashur-dan II (933-910) and extending through to Shalmaneser III (859-824) who was effective in leading Assyria in a period of expansion.³⁰ However, towards the end of the reign of Shalmaneser III the empire experienced a period of internal dissent and weakened leadership. While stronger leaders would ultimately emerge, because of external and internal pressures exerted on the empire, the Assyrians were not an immediate threat to Israel in the early part of the eighth century. Assyria's priority was to maintain their existing territory and any expansionist

²⁶ See Appendix F of this Thesis-Project for a map of the Assyrian Empire.

²⁷ D. R. W. Wood, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 96; H. G. Andersen, "Assyria", in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 372. See also W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 357 who states that "The last brilliant period of Assyria was the 130 years of the neo-Assyrian Empire from 745-612 B.C."

²⁸ Tiglath-Pileser I's reign was impressive not only because of its length but from his many conquests. See *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), 167.

²⁹ Andersen, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 374-376.

³⁰ Andersen, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 376; Pfeiffer, Vos and Rea, *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, 167.

desires needed to be put on hold.³¹

A weakened Assyria enabled the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II to lead his nation through a time of stability, expansion and prosperity. Regarding the feats of Jeroboam II, Kaiser states, "In less than twenty-five years Jeroboam II was able to take a nation that was just about ready to die and turn it into one of the great powers of his day."³² This record of expansion and prosperity is the context for the ministry of Amos and the messages he delivered.

During the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, Israel and Judah lived peaceably for several years.³³ However, subsequent to the death of Jeroboam II, Israel's king Pekah entered into an alliance with King Rezin of Syria for the purpose of attacking Judah because of her reluctance to join their resistance against Assyria.³⁴ This military alliance sparked the beginning of the Syro-Ephraimite war. Judah's desire for protection resulted in King Ahaz appealing to Assyria for assistance contrary to the prophet Isaiah's counsel not to trust in foreign alliances but to rely on Yahweh's deliverance.³⁵ Tiglath-Pileser III was now the new ruler of Assyria and was aggressively restoring his nation to military dominance.³⁶ In response to King Ahaz's request, Tiglath-Pileser III delivered Judah as he gained dominance over areas of Syria and Israel. Judah, while delivered from the

³¹ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 357; Andersen, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 376; cf. Shalom M. Paul, *Amos* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 1-2.

³² Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 352.

³³ The following summary in pages 86-91 is adapted from Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 37-42.

³⁴ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 361-362.

³⁵ Cf. Isaiah 7-9.

³⁶ Pfeiffer, Vos and Rea, *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, 167 state that Tiglath-Pileser III "was one of Assyria's most celebrated warriors ... He was tremendously successful in his concerted drive to revive the Assyrian Empire. He secured the boundaries to the N, E, and S, and then moved W to claim for Assyria a port on the Mediterranean. His drive was not just to annex land, but to gain control of the caravan routes that plied the coastal regions and thus to pour the wealth of the world into the coffers of Assyria."

immediate threat was nevertheless now indebted to the Assyrians. Shalmaneser V succeeded Tiglath-Pileser III and he advanced against the northern kingdom of Israel and destroyed the capital city of Samaria in 722 B.C. This defeat brought an end to the northern kingdom as its people were taken into captivity.³⁷ Some of the Minor Prophets, like Amos and Hosea, warned against this threat of Assyrian captivity.³⁸

During the reign of King Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.) King Sennacherib of Assyria tried to expand his kingdom further south by overcoming Judah.³⁹ In 701 B.C. he besieged Jerusalem and the Assyrians would have been victorious had the LORD not supernaturally intervened as an angel of the LORD destroyed 185,000 Assyrians.⁴⁰ Hezekiah was succeeded by his son Manasseh (687-642 B.C.) who was one of Judah's worst kings. In addition to being subservient to the Assyrians he led the nation further away from Yahweh and into idolatry. Amon, the son of Manasseh reigned for two years but was assassinated and was succeeded by Manasseh's younger son. Josiah was one of Judah's good kings who enacted various spiritual reforms and endeavored to return the people to the true worship of Yahweh and rid the country of idolatry. The early part of Jeremiah's ministry was under the reign of Josiah.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire And The Minor Prophets (ca. 626 - 539 B.C.)⁴¹

Parallel to these happenings in the southern kingdom, Assyria was experiencing internal difficulties and was losing its grip on the empire. The two other more powerful nations who would vie to replace Assyria as the new dominant empire were Babylon and

³⁷ 2 Kings 17:5-8, 21-22.

³⁸ Amos 5:27; 7:17; Hosea 11:5.

³⁹ Pfeiffer, Vos and Rea, *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, 169.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 36-39; 2 Kings 18-19.

⁴¹ See Appendix G of this Thesis-Project for a map depicting the Medo-Babylonian Empire.

Egypt. Egypt was flexing its expansionist muscle in the south while the Babylonians were challenging the Assyrians for control of Mesopotamia. Babylon engaged in battle with Assyria and in 612 B.C. destroyed Nineveh, Assyria's capital city. The Assyrians then reached out to the Egyptians to form an alliance in an attempt to prevent the Babylonians from advancing further.

As the Egyptians under King Neco II made their way to assist the Assyrians in 609 B.C. they engaged in warfare with Judah at which time King Josiah was killed and as a result Judah came under the control of Egypt. Jehoahaz, as son of Josiah was placed on the throne by Egypt but this was short lived as he was deported and replaced by his brother Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.). Jehoiakim was not a godly king as he undid the reforms of his father Josiah and was in conflict with the prophet Jeremiah over idolatry and the social injustices of the day. Under Jehoiakim Judah became a loyal subject to the Egyptians until the Babylonians defeated Egypt and Assyria at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.

Following the Battle of Carchemish, the Egyptians headed homeward with the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar in pursuit. With Babylon having gained the upper hand over Egypt, King Jehoiakim switched his allegiance to Babylon who now controlled the region. It was during this time in 605 B.C. that Babylon deported Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and other bright young men from Judah, as well as the holy temple vessels.⁴² A further battle at the Egyptian border between Egypt and Babylon in 601 B.C. ended with neither army gaining the upper hand so the Babylonians

⁴² Daniel 1:1-7.

returned home to regroup. King Jehoiakim interpreted Babylon's return home as weakness and in his desire to be on the right side of history he pledged loyalty to Egypt and rebelled against Babylon. Jehoiakim's disloyalty did not endear himself to King Nebuchadnezzar who in 598 B.C. with his army rebuilt, led the Babylonians against Judah. With the advancing of the Babylonians against Judah, Jehoiakim died and Jehoiachin his son was then made king over Judah. Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 597 B.C. at which time he along with about 10,000 others including Ezekiel were deported to Babylon.

The Babylonians then appointed Zedekiah as king over Judah. He was not a good king for Judah and often conflicted with the prophet Jeremiah. Zedekiah's attempt at rebelling against Babylon by joining with several other nations proved unsuccessful. After Nebuchadnezzar solidified control over the region of Babylonia he once again turned his attention to Judah and Jerusalem. The Babylonians laid siege against the city of Jerusalem and after a lengthy eighteen months finally broke through the walls. Many of the people from Judah were killed and the survivors, apart from some of the poor, were led off into captivity to Babylon just as Jeremiah the prophet had warned.

Gedaliah's appointment as governor over Judah by the Babylonians was not ultimately successful as the people mounted a rebellion against Babylon by killing Gedaliah. The resistors then fled from Judah to Egypt in order to escape the retaliatory judgment by the Babylonians forcing Jeremiah to go with them.

The Persian Empire And The Minor Prophets (ca. 539 - 332 B.C.)⁴³

The reign of Nebuchadnezzar over Babylon and much of the Ancient Near East extended from 605 B.C. to 552 B.C. However, following his death the empire entered a period of decline and was succeeded by the Persians who were also aided by the Medes. Cyrus king of Persia captured Babylon in 539 B.C. and their rule over Palestine endured for the next 200 years until Alexander the Great overtook the area in 333-332 B.C.

Cyrus King of Persia enacted a different foreign policy than both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The Assyrians scattered exiles throughout their controlled region while the Babylonians allowed the exiles to remain in community in their foreign land. Cyrus on the other hand allowed exiles to return to their homeland and in 539 B.C. he issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to Palestine, thereby commencing the post-exilic era.⁴⁴

The post-exilic returns to Palestine under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah focused on rebuilding the city walls, the temple as well as spiritually reforming the people. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were the three post-exilic prophets who played a key role in spurring the people towards completing the major rebuilding projects.

In summary, understanding the geopolitical context of the world scene is essential to appreciating both the message of the prophets and the challenges they faced. For the pre-exilic prophets the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities are major issues impacting their ministries. For the post-exilic prophets, the rise of the Persian empire following the

⁴³ See Appendix H of this Thesis-Project for a map of the Persian Empire.

⁴⁴ Ezra 1:2-4.

demise of the Babylonians forms an important background to their ministries.

The Spiritual Problems Confronting The Prophets And The People Of God

Three major problems the prophets consistently addressed were idolatry, social injustice and ritualistic worship.

Idolatry In The Minor Prophets

Israel brought their idolatrous tendencies with them from Egypt and it clearly demonstrated itself when Aaron built the golden calf on the occasion of Moses' delayed return while on Mount Sinai receiving the Law from the LORD.⁴⁵ Moses warned his people that intermarrying foreign women would result in their hearts being divided between devotion to Yahweh and the foreign gods. Tragically, this prediction was clearly fulfilled as evidenced in the experience of King Solomon.⁴⁶ When the kingdom of Israel divided into the northern and southern kingdoms, Israel's king Jeroboam I immediately erected two golden calves at Dan and Bethel to enable his people to worship in their own territory. In addition, a new non-Levitical priesthood was also introduced. Judah was not exempt from the sin of idolatry as she too engaged in syncretistic worship incorporating the worship of Yahweh and pagan idols. God's people were surrounded by foreign nations and the worship of a plethora of "gods." Of major attraction to God's people was the worship of Baal and Asherah.⁴⁷

Ritualistic Worship

Within this religious context God's people continued to worship Yahweh.

⁴⁵ Exodus 32.

⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:1-10.

⁴⁷ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 64.

However, He demanded exclusive worship and devotion since He alone is God. Such divided loyalty and worship violated the heart of the unique covenantal relationship between Yahweh and His people; that relationship perfectly articulated in the words, "I will be your God and you will be My people."⁴⁸ God's people mistakenly embraced the notion that as long as they were observing the Old Testament sacrificial system and bringing their various sacrifices to the temple, that the LORD would be pleased. Their mechanistic view of God became normative in their worship experience. They failed to understand or accept that God wanted their heart of devotion and for their offerings and sacrifices to be expressions of worship motivated by love and loyalty. He detested their ritualistic, hypocritical worship and powerfully expressed His displeasure in such passages as Isaiah 1, Amos 5 and Malachi 1. With regularity the prophets challenge God's people to turn from their idolatrous worship in repentance to the Lord and worship Him alone.⁴⁹ Amos in his prophecy rebukes God's people for their hypocritical and ritualistic worship.⁵⁰

Social Injustice In The Minor Prophets

Both the Old and New Testament teach that love of God cannot be separated from love for man. Worship of Yahweh was not to be divorced from one's treatment of others. The shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 affirms the importance of loving God. Elsewhere, Deuteronomy provides clear instruction on the importance of social justice whether it be caring for those who are weak, ensuring fairness in the courts or looking after the

⁴⁸ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 64.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 2:8-9; Jeremiah 2:20-28; 10:1-16; Ezekiel 8:1-18; Hosea 4:10-19; 8:5; Amos 5:26; 7:9; Micah 1:5-7; Habakkuk 2:19-20; Zephaniah 1:4-6.

⁵⁰ Amos 2:8; 4:4-5; 5:18-27; 8:5.

vulnerable including the widows, orphans and the poor.⁵¹ In the prophets, as the people became unfaithful in their relationship with the LORD there was frequently a corresponding ignoring of their responsibilities to care for their fellow man. Prophets consistently rebuked the people regarding their sins of social injustice. They warned that their worship of Yahweh was worthless if it was accompanied by ill treatment of their fellow man.⁵² Amos repeatedly confronted the people with their sins of injustice exposing how the powerful inflicted pain upon the poor and the vulnerable.⁵³

Summary Of The Minor Prophetic Books

Following is a summary of each of the minor prophetic books excluding Amos. Attention is given to the timeline of their ministry, their primary audience and some of the key issues they addressed.

Summary Of The Book Of Hosea

Hosea was an eighth century prophet who linked his ministry to Israel's King Jeroboam II who reigned from 793-753 B.C. He also linked his ministry with four kings of Judah including Uzziah (783-742 B.C.), Jotham (742-735 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.) and Hezekiah (715-687/686 B.C.).⁵⁴ It is suggested that Hosea did not list the kings who succeeded Jeroboam II because he recognized him as the last legitimate king of the Northern Kingdom given the tumultuous time which followed his death with several occupying the throne for brief periods of time.⁵⁵ If Hosea began his ministry in the latter

⁵¹ Deuteronomy 10:17-19; 15:1-11; 19:15-21; 24:14-22; 26:12-13.

⁵² Cf. Isaiah 1:11-13 1a; Jeremiah 5:28-29; Micah 6:7-8; Amos 5:10-12, 21-24.

⁵³ Amos 2:6-7; 4:1; 5:11-12; 8:4-6.

⁵⁴ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 266.

⁵⁵ Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 23.

years of Jeroboam II's reign (ca. 760 B.C.) and concluded his service in the early years of Hezekiah's reign (ca. 710 B.C.) then he could have ministered for at least fifty years.⁵⁶ Ministering during much of the eighth century, Hosea was a contemporary of Amos and Jonah as well as Isaiah and Micah.⁵⁷

Two major concerns providing the backdrop to Hosea's ministry were the decline and instability of the northern kingdom as well as the threat of the Assyrian Empire with its expansionist aspirations. The ineffective leadership of Israel's kings and their faulty trust in foreign alliances exposed Israel's vulnerability ultimately resulting in the northern kingdom being exiled (9:3; 10:7) which happened in 722 B.C. at the hands of the Assyrians.

The two major divisions in the book of Hosea are chapters 1-3 and 4-14. Hosea's marriage to unfaithful Gomer, a prostitute illustrates the relationship between Israel and Yahweh.⁵⁸ The themes of harlotry and prostitution are used frequently throughout the prophets to portray the religious apostasy of God's people.⁵⁹ The syncretistic worship of God's people was prevalent in the days of Hosea as they embraced the worship of the Baal and the Canaanite gods alongside the worship of Yahweh.⁶⁰ This first section of the book provides a foundation for the remaining chapters as the alternating themes of

⁵⁶ Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 22-23; David Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 64.

⁵⁷ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 266.

⁵⁸ An important interpretive issue in Hosea is whether his marriage is symbolic or literal. If literal marriage is intended, was Gomer a prostitute at the time of marriage or a subsequent development? Consider Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 591 for a brief summary of the marriage views. See also Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 43-50; Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 337; Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 14-15.

⁵⁹ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 591. See Exodus 34:14-16; Numbers 25:1; Jeremiah 3:2; Ezekiel 16.

⁶⁰ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 589-591.

judgment and restoration get repeated through a series of oracles in chapters 4-14.

Hosea illustrates the tension between God's justice, which requires judgment to fall on His people for their continuing unfaithfulness, and His abiding love for His people resulting in their ultimate restoration.

The prophet warns of a judgment against the Northern Kingdom in which they would be removed from their land (9:3; 10:7); a prophecy which would later be fulfilled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Summary Of The Book Of Joel

Joel while employing the imagery of locust invasions prophesies concerning the future Day of the Lord in which Israel would be judged and subsequently restored while her enemies would be ultimately judged. Given the certainty of her future judgment the prophet urgently appeals for God's people to repent.

Apart from being "the son of Pethuel" (1:1), the identity of the prophet is largely unknown. Judging from his concerns with the temple and the worship there, some have concluded that he probably lived around Jerusalem and possibly served as a temple prophet.⁶¹

The time of Joel's prophetic ministry is not easily determined and the discussion has generated suggested dates ranging from the ninth to second century B.C.⁶² By drawing on the internal evidence of the text two of the most commonly held times for Joel's ministry is a pre-exilic ninth century date or a post-exilic date following the

⁶¹ Tremper Longman III and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 409.

⁶² See Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 413-414 for a summary of suggested dates and the arguments for the most credible suggestions.

Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.⁶³

Chapter 1 depicts a literal locust invasion that will bring devastating results to the land effecting all classes of people (1:2-12) followed by an urgent appeal for repentance (1:13-20) if perhaps God's hand of judgment might be withheld. A second invasion of locusts depicting a future army invasion consisting of either an enemy nation (perhaps the Assyrians or Babylonians) or the Lord's own army is then presented (2:1-11).⁶⁴ A second appeal is then made for the people to repent (2:12-17). This invasion occurs in the Day of the Lord which is great and awesome (2:11). God's gracious response on behalf of His people constitutes the second part of the book. He will restore and bless His people and their land including the promise of pouring out His spirit upon them irrespective of gender and age (2:18-32; 3:17-21). Additionally, the LORD will bring devastating judgment upon the enemy nations of God's people (3:1-16).

Joel's prophecy, as with other prophets, seems to include the feature of both near view and distant view elements within his messages. For example, in his judgment declaration specific nations are mentioned and the crimes they have enacted against Israel for which they will be judged (3:1-8). However, the remainder of the message envisions a more distant future time of devastating judgment in the Day of the Lord accompanied by supernatural signs in the heavens (3:15).

The book of Joel highlights God's sovereignty in His control over His covenant

⁶³ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 596-597; Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 414 favor a post-exilic date while Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, 266-268 provides a summary of the arguments for a pre-exilic ninth century date.

⁶⁴ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, The Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 206, 232-234, 250; Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 278; Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 416-417.

people as well as the nations. His righteous character demands judgment against evil whether it be His covenant people or the enemy nations. However, He is also a God who is gracious and compassionate extending mercy to the repentant providing safety for all who take refuge in Him. These are emphases and themes found throughout the prophetic writings.

Summary Of The Book Of Obadiah

Obadiah, the shortest of the minor prophetic books details an oracle of judgment against the nation of Edom. The prophet speaks of the Day of the Lord as a time when Edom and the nations would experience divine judgment and God's people would enjoy blessing and restoration.

Edom would experience judgment because of the violence done to their brother Jacob, God's covenant people (Obadiah 1:10). Historically, a strong adversarial relationship characterized the Edomites and the Hebrews beginning with Jacob and Esau in the womb of their mother Rebekah.⁶⁵ Their conflict continued until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., an event which brought great delight to the Edomites.

The book can be divided into two main sections: 1) The announcement of judgment against Edom (1:14) and The announcement of the Day of the Lord (1:15-21).

Edom who proudly thought she was invincible because of her strategic geographic location will be brought low (1-4). Her destruction will be thorough and she will be attacked by the very people she thought she could trust (1:5-9). The precise

⁶⁵ The adversarial relationship between Edom and Israel can be traced throughout the Old Testament as highlighted in the following passages: Genesis 25, 27; Numbers 20:14-21; 1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:13-14; 1 Kings 11:14-22; 2 Kings 8:20-22.

reasons for her judgment are due to violence done to her brother Jacob. Not only did Edom delight in Judah's adversity but she assisted the enemy and personally benefited from the plunder. Determining when this occasion transpired will serve to identify the context for Obadiah's ministry (1:9-14).

In the Day of the Lord God will judge the nations (1:15-16), bring blessing and restoration to His people (1:17-18) and establish His kingdom (1:19-21).

One of the challenges in studying Obadiah is determining the date of his prophecy. Since the prophet does not date his ministry according to the reign of any king or any other biographical details, the student must look for internal clues from the text to ascertain the timeline. The major clue for establishing the time of Obadiah's ministry is 1:11 where Edom is guilty of mocking and participating in the destruction of Jerusalem. Several suggestions have been made for when the events of Obadiah 1:11 could have occurred ranging from a 9th to 4th century B.C. date.⁶⁶ Many commentators embrace a sixth century date subsequent to the destruction of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. although others like Kaiser and Wood advocate why a ninth century date during the time of King Jehoram (843-841 B.C.) best fits the textual evidence.⁶⁷

If an earlier 9th century B.C. date is embraced for Obadiah then it makes him the earliest writing prophet to use the term "Day of the Lord." Obadiah, like some of the other prophets, seems to use Edom symbolically to refer to all of the nations.⁶⁸ Through

⁶⁶ LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament*, 455.

⁶⁷ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 337; Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, 262-264. See also Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, 140-141; see also Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 307-308.

⁶⁸ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 298. See Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, 140.

the first part of Obadiah's prophecy Edom refers to the singular nation comprised of Esau's descendants (Obadiah 1-14). However, when Obadiah prophecies concerning the Day of the Lord his attention is focused on the "nations" (cf. Obadiah 1:15).

While the major focus in Obadiah is against Edom the book had a major purpose for God's people. It reinforced God's faithful promise to bless those who bless His people and curse those who treated His people adversely.

Summary Of The Book Of Jonah

The opening words of the book of Jonah do not link the prophet's ministry to the reign of any king of Israel or Judah. However, the prophet is identified as the son of Amittai (1:1) which links him to the prophet in 2 Kings 14:25 placing his ministry in the century during the reign of Israel's King Jeroboam II, 786-746 B.C. This chronology makes Jonah a contemporary of both Hosea and Amos. Following a brief introduction confirming that the LORD gave him a message for Nineveh, Jonah begins to tell his story. Herein marks a distinctive approach to his prophecy when compared to the majority of the other prophets. Rather than delivering a series of oracles the book of Jonah more closely corresponds to a historical narrative.⁶⁹ Additionally, it incorporates satire, "the exposure through ridicule or rebuke of human vice or folly."⁷⁰ Through this satirical approach Jonah exposed the folly of Israel's hard heartedness as Nineveh's response of repentance served as a rebuke to Israel for her rejection of the message of the prophets (i.e. Amos and Hosea). Also, Jonah's spiritual insensitivity, marked by his nationalistic and spiritual bias against an Assyrian people he believed to be unworthy

⁶⁹ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 299.

⁷⁰ Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 261.

recipients of God's grace, illustrated the prideful condition of disobedient Israel who remained insensitive to the spiritual plight of the other nations.

In addition to his nationalistic pride, Jonah's reluctance to take God's message to Nineveh was perhaps further propelled by the prophecies of Amos and Hosea. Amos announced that Israel was going into captivity and Hosea specifically identified the Assyrians as the captors.⁷¹ Nineveh, as the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was the last place where Jonah desired to see God's grace extended. While he was delivering a message of judgment he was confident all along that God would relent and show mercy (4:1-3).

Important considerations when teaching the book of Jonah include the following. Familiarity with the arguments regarding whether Jonah should be considered as historical or parabolic or some kind of fiction is important.⁷² Observing the highly structural organization of the book as reflected in its theological themes, repetition of key words or phrases as well as the abundant use of irony helps unpack the powerful message of the book.

God's sovereignty over all of creation (1:4, 15b, 17; 2:10; 4:6, 7) as well as His desire to bless Gentile peoples constitutes key theological themes. Terms and phrases repeated include the words "rise up" (1:2, 3, 6; 3:2-3), "great" (1:2, 4, 12, 17; 3:2, 3; 4:11), "to provide" (1:17; 4:6, 7, 8), "go down" (1:3, 6; 2:6). Examples of irony include the prophet trying to escape from God (1:3), the sailors being more spiritually sensitive than the prophet (1:10, 14-16), the immediate repentance of Nineveh compared to Israel's

⁷¹ Amos 7:17; Hosea 11:5.

⁷² See the summary provided by Longman & Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 444-445.

hard heartedness (3:6-10), the prophet discouraged by having converts (4:1-3), as well as Jonah being more concerned for a plant than for people (4:9-11).

Summary Of The Book Of Micah

Micah prophesied during the reigns of three kings of Judah, namely, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1:1) which places his ministry in the timeframe of 750 - 687 B.C. As such Micah was a contemporary of Hosea, Isaiah and Amos. During this time Assyria was the dominant world power who took captive the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and subsequently besieged Judah in 701 B.C.⁷³ Micah would have been present to witness the turbulent times characterizing God's people during this era.

In addition to the political unrest among the southern kingdom of Judah there was also social distress. Economic prosperity during the reign of King Uzziah earlier in the eighth century had resulted in a new wealthy class of merchants. Unfairness in the market place became normative and Micah addresses these injustices.⁷⁴ Insincere worship, characterized by a mechanical ritualistic worship of God (6:6-8), alongside the practice of idolatry called for judgment.

Micah prophesied against both Israel and Judah, urging them to repentance in the face of coming judgment as well as providing them a message of hope and restoration centering in the promise of a future Deliverer, i.e. the Messiah (5:2-9). Three major components to the book are observable. In chapters 1-3 Micah announces that God's justice will condemn Israel and Judah for their sin (idolatry, social injustice and insincere worship) while giving them a promise of restoration (2:12-13). The message of hope in

⁷³ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 310; 2 Kings 18-19.

⁷⁴ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 643-644.

chapters 4-5 details the promise that God will establish a kingdom that will include Gentile nations, and the king, i.e. the Messiah (5:2) will reign in righteousness bringing peace to His people and justice to His enemies. The third section, chapters 6-7, repeats the two major themes. Employing the form of a covenant lawsuit (6:1-16), Micah declares God's judgment on Israel and Judah for their sin before returning to the promise of subsequent restoration and blessing for His people (7:7-20).

Summary Of The Book Of Nahum

Nahum, the second prophet who delivered an oracle of judgment against Nineveh, ministered at least 100 years after the prophet of Jonah. In the book of Nahum, God's unrelenting judgment against the Assyrians stands in sharp contrast to Jonah's experience where God relented in mercy against the repentant Assyrians.

A specific date for Nahum's ministry is not provided in the superscription. However, parameters for establishing the timeline of his prophecy can be ascertained through particular events referenced in the book. Specifically, Nahum prophesied concerning the future destruction of Nineveh which means that he ministered prior to 612 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the city. Additionally, Nahum compared the future destruction of Nineveh to the downfall of Thebes (3:8) by the Assyrians which occurred in 663 B.C.⁷⁵ Given these two events, Nahum's prophetic ministry can be placed between 663 B.C. and 612 B.C.⁷⁶

The book of Nahum primarily addresses the certain and thorough destruction of the Assyrian Empire. Nineveh is guilty not only of idolatry (1:14) but also of extreme

⁷⁵ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 652.

⁷⁶ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 320.

cruelty, violence, and injustice (1:14; 3:4, 19).⁷⁷ Her judgment is so certain that even though it is still future the prophet can speak of it as already having occurred (1:15). This message would have been an encouragement to Judah (1:7) reminding them that God in accordance with His covenant promise to Abraham will hold their enemy nations accountable and will administer justice to all (1:8).⁷⁸ Assyria had invaded and scattered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and had attempted to overthrow Judah as well.⁷⁹ Nahum's message brought comfort to Judah affirming that God would act on her behalf and not only would the Assyrian Empire be destroyed but the Southern Kingdom would also experience God's blessing (1:15-2:2).

Summary Of The Book Of Habakkuk

Habakkuk, like several of the other Minor Prophets, does not link his ministry to the reign of any kings, or any specific historical event, nor does he provide biographical details that help identify the date for his ministry. The primary textual clue for dating his ministry occurs in 1:6 where the Lord in response to Habakkuk's complaint of Yahweh's inaction states, "Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans." This statement reflects that the Babylonians are in the process of becoming the dominant world power replacing the Assyrians. While a range from 625 B.C. to 575 B.C. is possible, the description of 1:6 probably places Habakkuk's ministry prior to the invasions by King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians into Judah in 598/7 B.C. or 586 B.C.⁸⁰ It is probable that Habakkuk was

⁷⁷ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read The Bible Book By Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 242.

⁷⁸ Genesis 12:3.

⁷⁹ 2 Kings 18.

⁸⁰ Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 465; Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 322.

a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Nahum.⁸¹

The style in which Habakkuk conveys his message is distinctive from most of the other prophets. The book details the prophet's struggle with God's method of dealing with His people. Habakkuk communicates how his heart was transformed from challenge to praise as a result of embracing the truth that God's sovereign judgments are just and fair. A dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh carries the freight of the first half of the book (1:2-2:5) wherein Habakkuk expresses concern with Yahweh's inaction regarding the social injustice and wickedness characterizing God's people (1:2-4). When Yahweh reveals that He is raising up the Babylonians to bring judgment against His people (1:5-11), Habakkuk questions how God can use a nation more wicked to bring judgment against Judah (1:12-2:1).

The Lord remains resolute affirming that this judgment will happen and Habakkuk needs to record the vision (2:2-5) while being challenged with the classic verse of the prophecy, "the just shall live by faith" (2:4). The arrogant, i.e. the Babylonians, stand in contrast to the righteous, i.e. Habakkuk, and the response of the righteous is to trust God.

A series of woes directed against the Babylonians informs Habakkuk that God will hold this wicked nation accountable for their actions (2:6-20) as the wicked will not ultimately prosper with impunity. The role of the nations in the judgments of God is a feature found throughout the prophets that is filled with irony. God frequently employs the nations as agents in bringing judgment upon His covenant people for their

⁸¹ LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 322; Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 465.

unfaithfulness and then subsequently judges them for how they treated God's people.

The nations however, never have to be convinced against their will to afflict God's people and are almost always unaware that they are being employed as servants of Yahweh.

God's faithfulness to His promise to Abraham ultimately requires Him to judge the nations.⁸² God's pronouncements of judgment against Babylon remind Habakkuk that He is supreme, sovereign and worthy of awesome worship (2:14, 20).

A psalm of worship closes out the book as Habakkuk portrays God as warrior and deliverer (3:1-16).⁸³ Habakkuk is surrendered to the LORD and celebrates that He is worthy of trust and worship even in the most adverse circumstances as He accomplishes His purposes for His people (3:17-19).

Summary Of The Book Of Zephaniah

Zephaniah places his ministry in the reign of Josiah, king of Judah which extended from 640-609 B.C. (1:1). A more precise date for Zephaniah's ministry has been suggested as 627/626 B.C. placing him before the notable reforms of Josiah, although one cannot be certain on this matter.⁸⁴ Additionally, if the "Hezekiah" referenced in the superscription refers to Judah's former king, then Zephaniah is connected with royalty.⁸⁵ If this were the case then Zephaniah would have had access to the royal court.⁸⁶ Chronologically, Zephaniah was also a contemporary of Jeremiah and probably Habakkuk.⁸⁷

⁸² Genesis 12:3.

⁸³ Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 468.

⁸⁴ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 670-671; Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 471.

⁸⁵ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 670.

⁸⁶ Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 470.

⁸⁷ Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 470.

Zephaniah's ministry occurred as Assyria's dominance as a world empire was declining. The two primary powers in the Ancient Near East during the first half of the seventh century were the dominant Assyrians and the Cushites, the rulers of Egypt, who were less powerful. The Cushites ruled Egypt from 710 B.C. to 663 B.C. and during this time Judah and Egypt maintained strong relations with the Cushites having a strong presence throughout Judah. The defeat of Thebes (the Cushites) in 663 B.C. by the Assyrians marked a significant change to the geopolitical landscape. This battle marked the end of Cushite rule in Egypt and ironically marked the beginning of the end for the Assyrian empire.⁸⁸ Babylon would then become the nation to rise in dominance which would ultimately play a key role in executing God's judgment against Judah. However, Zephaniah does not explicitly identify Babylon as Judah's enemy in his prophecy.

Within the nation, Zephaniah would have grown up witnessing the idolatry and departure of God's people away from the covenant during the reign of King Manasseh making the nation of Judah ripe for God's judgment.⁸⁹

Zephaniah emphasizes the Day of the Lord more than any other of the twelve Minor Prophets making this fast approaching day (1:7) the central theme of the book.⁹⁰ This day will be a time of judgment upon Judah and the nations as well as a time of restoration and blessing for the repentant remnant of the covenant people and the Gentile nations.

Key themes found in Zephaniah which are repeated throughout the prophetic

⁸⁸ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 332.

⁸⁹ Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 470; Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 671.

⁹⁰ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 333.

books include God's sovereignty over all peoples and creation (1:1-3); God's justice manifested in His righteous judgment against Judah as well as the nations (1:4-2:3; 2:4-15); and God's grace and mercy in preserving a repentant remnant from Judah as well as from the Gentile nations (3:3; 2:7; 3:19-20).

Summary Of The Book Of Haggai

The dating of Haggai's ministry in accordance with the reign of Darius, king of Persia places him in the post-exilic era (1:1). Haggai provides a series of dates in his book that indicate his ministry took place during a four-month period, equivalent to August 29 through December 18, 520 B.C. (1:1, 15; 2:1, 10, 20).

The background to the ministry of Haggai is rooted in the return of some of the captives from Babylonia as documented in Ezra 1-4. The specific challenge facing Haggai is that the people who have returned to the land of Palestine in order to rebuild the temple have abandoned the project. Undoubtedly, the expectations associated with a return to the land and a glorious restoration as prophesied by earlier prophets has not materialized. The people are back in the land but they are under foreign domination and life is difficult. As a result of discouragement, opposition and misplaced priorities work on the temple has ceased. In response, Haggai delivered four sermons exhorting the people to reengage in the temple project by reminding them of the need for covenant faithfulness while assuring them of God's presence and His commitment to ultimately fulfill His kingdom promises.

In the first message (1:2-15) Haggai exposed the peoples' wrong priorities as evidenced in their commitment to dwell in their own completed houses while allowing the house of God to go unfinished (1:4). God is not pleased with their misplaced

priorities. The people are experiencing His covenant judgments (1:5-6, 9-11) and the solution is for them to resume the rebuilding of the temple (1:7-8). In uncharacteristic fashion, the people heed the message of the prophet and obey the word of the Lord buoyed by the assurance of the Lord's presence (1:12-15).

The second message (2:1-9) addressed the discouragement that resulted when the people realized that the rebuilt temple would not be as grand as Solomon's due to the limited resources of the returned remnant. However, success is not determined by the externals and Haggai assured them of God's presence while promising that the future glory of the temple will supersede the greatness of Solomon's. For some the future glory is linked to the presence of Jesus in His earthly ministry while others connect it to a "future age when God overturns the nations and establishes his rule on earth" (1:6-7a).⁹¹

The third message (2:10-19) addressed the need for holy living. The people's disobedience by abandoning the temple rebuild resulted in their worship being defiled. However, "from this day onward" (2:15, 18), i.e. when they resumed work on the temple, they would experience God's blessing.

The final message (2:20-23), relates to the future Messianic age. Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah and a Davidic descendant, is likened to a signet ring, the authoritative royal seal used by kings. Haggai envisioned a future day (2:23), when royal decrees would no longer be issued by Gentile world leaders but by the Messiah when God's kingdom was fully established.

Haggai exhorted that in view of the future restored kingdom, which God was

⁹¹ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 358-359; Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 453.

committed to establishing, the remnant needed to return to covenant faithfulness by rebuilding the temple and engaging in authentic worship of Yahweh as they waited for the future fulfillment of His kingdom promises!

Summary Of The Book Of Zechariah

Zechariah as one of the three post-exilic prophets links his ministry to the reign of Darius, King of Persia, who reigned from 522-486 B.C. Three specific dates provided in Zechariah chapters 1-8, place his ministry to King Darius during 520-518 B.C. This chronology makes Zechariah a contemporary of Haggai with his ministry commencing just two months after the beginning of Haggai's (Haggai 1:1 cf. Zechariah 1:1).

Zechariah was also a priest, a descendant of Iddo who returned to the land with Zerubbabel who lead in the return to rebuild the temple.⁹² A major focus in the prophecy of Zechariah, as with Haggai, was the rebuilding of the temple. Zechariah was concerned with the same challenges as Haggai. The people who had returned to rebuild the temple had become discouraged and overwhelmed.

Zechariah's name, "Yahweh remembers", corresponds beautifully to the message of his book.⁹³ The book of Zechariah records eight visions, four messages and two oracles which were given to the remnant living back in the land of Palestine. The purpose of his ministry was to encourage covenant faithfulness among God's people while assuring them that God had not forgotten them as confirmed by His promise to send the Messiah to build His kingdom. The assurance of future, certain victory was designed to compel God's people to right living which remains a consistent emphasis

⁹² Nehemiah 12:4, 16.

⁹³ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 345.

throughout the prophets. The appeal to covenant faithfulness is borne out in the call to repentance (1:2-6) and social justice (7:4-10). The incentive for covenant faithfulness is found in the promise of the Messiah to return to Jerusalem (8:3), re-enter the completed temple (1:16) and ultimately be a protection for His people against their enemies (14:3). Zechariah's message that God had not forgotten His people or His promises would have been a welcome encouragement to God's people.

Apocalyptic literature is a key literary feature of Zechariah which demands genre sensitivity both hermeneutically and homiletically on the part of the preacher.

Summary Of The Book Of Malachi

The book of Malachi closes out the Old Testament canon not only as the final post-exilic book but also the last of the Minor Prophets. Malachi means "my messenger"; an expression conveying not only the proper name of the prophet (1:1) but also a designation for a future messenger who was to come (3:1).

There is no superscription to help date the time of the prophet's ministry. However, the description of the circumstances found within the book place it within a post-exilic context. A period after the reconstruction of the temple following the ministry of Haggai and during the time of Nehemiah corresponds to the time Malachi ministered.⁹⁴ Many of the problems addressed in Malachi are also found in Nehemiah including the problems of intermarriages, unfaithful priests, failure to tithe and social injustice.⁹⁵

Malachi is addressing a people who have returned to the land from captivity but were not experiencing the full anticipated glory of the restored kingdom that the earlier

⁹⁴ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 360 suggests an approximate date of 430 B.C.

⁹⁵ Fee and Stuart, *How To Read The Bible Book By Book*, 263.

prophets had spoken concerning. The remnant is back in the land and the temple is rebuilt but this represents only a partial fulfillment of Old Testament expectation.

Malachi delivered a series of bold disputations that exposed the people's apathy, social injustices and their hypocritical, ritualistic worship as he urged them to repent and return to covenant faithfulness. He assured them not only of God's continuing love (1:2-5) but also of His commitment to fulfill the promises of a future restored kingdom. He warned of the coming Day of the Lord which would be preceded by the preparation ministry of a future messenger (3:1). This future day will include judgment for those living in opposition to Yahweh and deliverance for those living in obedience (3:13-4:3). As the book of Malachi closes out the Old Testament and anticipates the New, the prophet encouraged the people to be among the obedient evidenced by keeping the law while awaiting a future Elijah who would precede the Day of the Lord (4:4-6).⁹⁶

The Bible And Literary Genre

The Bible is a wonderful, inspired, literary mosaic comprised of a variety of literary genres.⁹⁷ The various genres found in the Scriptures include story, proverbs, prophecy, poetry, epistle, parable and law among others.

Genre And The Message

Understanding the features of the various genres is important to properly interpreting the Bible because the genre not only conveys a message but it is actually part of the message. The genre impacts not only what is being said but how it is being said.

⁹⁶ Fee and Stuart, *How To Read The Bible Book By Book*, 265.

⁹⁷ Consider the following sample of passages which reflect a variety of genres including Ephesians 1:7; Mark 4:35-36; Psalm 2:1-3; Song of Solomon 4:1-7; Revelation 12:1-3.

One does not interpret Luke's gospel the same way as they interpret Solomon's wise sayings to his son. Nor does one read and interpret Paul's instruction to Timothy in the same manner as the lover's description of his bride in Song of Solomon...at least you shouldn't. It is not the way it was meant to be understood or read.

The author of Ecclesiastes presents a theory of writing that is found throughout the Bible as he states, "The teacher searched to *find just the right words*, and what he wrote was *upright and true*" or, "The Preacher sought to find *delightful* words and to write words of *truth correctly*."⁹⁸ This verse teaches that the Bible is God's truth and the Bible is literature. God is concerned not just in communicating propositional truth but He is concerned with how that truth gets communicated. The genre not only conveys the message but the genre is the message.

In capturing the reality that the genre is part of the message C. S. Lewis writes, "But there is a saner sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are."⁹⁹ Since understanding the nuances of the literary genre is so essential to capturing the message of the biblical author it is imperative that a literary approach characterize one's studying of the biblical text.

Genre Described

David Aune provides a helpful definition of genre when he states, "A literary genre may be defined as a group of texts that exhibit a coherent and recurring

⁹⁸ Ecclesiastes 12:10, italics added (New International Version, 1984; New American Standard Bible, 1977).

⁹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Collins, 1961), 10.

configuration of literary features involving form (including structure and style), content and function."¹⁰⁰ Leland Ryken's functional description indicates that a literary genre is nothing less than a "norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text."¹⁰¹ Stated even more simply a "genre is the literary term for a type or kind of writing."¹⁰²

While the Bible contains a varied mixture of genres, the dominant literary genres are story or narrative, poetry, proverb and visionary writings (which include prophecy and apocalypse).¹⁰³ Each genre is characterized by distinctive features and there are therefore specific rules or guidelines to be followed when one interprets a text from a respective genre. Identifying and understanding the various literary genres prepares the reader for how the text is to be read and interpreted.

Of significance for this thesis project is the literary genre of the prophets. A premise of this thesis project is that sensitivity to the prophetic genre is foundational to interpreting and effectively preaching sermons from the prophets.

Distinctive Characteristics Of Prophetic Genre

An overview of some of the distinguishing characteristics of the prophetic writings along with the key elements of the prophetic genre and the various literary forms found in the prophetic books will be presented in the following pages.

¹⁰⁰ David E Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia PA: The Westminster Press, 1987), 13.

¹⁰¹ Leland Ryken, *How To Read The Bible As Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 12.

¹⁰² Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 14.

¹⁰³ Ryken, *How To Read The Bible As Literature*, 26.

The Theocentric Focus Of The Prophets

The primary function of a prophet was to declare a message that not only had God as its source but also its subject. Greidanus writes, "Biblical scholars generally agree that prophets were messengers of God, heralds who delivered a communication from God...The message of the prophets was not only a message *from* God, however, but also a message *about* God, his covenant, his will, his judgment, his redemption, his coming kingdom."¹⁰⁴ The prophets were careful to emphasize that their words were not of human origin but were in fact that very words of God. The frequent messenger formulas employed such as "This is what the LORD says" or "The LORD spoke to me again" convey the authority by which they spoke.¹⁰⁵

However, not only are their words divine in origin but they are also centered on God. The messages of the prophets were theocentric. Elizabeth Achtemeier in speaking about the varied forms the prophets used in declaring their message affirms that their message was always centered on God. She writes,

This form [of prophetic oracle] undergoes wide variations in the Major Prophets ...but the emphasis on God's activity remains, and is present in all the principal genres of prophetic literature. Whether the form is that of woe oracle pronounced over the dead (Is 5:8-10) legal procedure (Is 41:21-24), parable (Is. 5:1-7), lamenting dirge (Jer 9:17-22) prophetic torah or teaching (Is 1:10-17), salvation oracle (Jer 35:18-19), priestly oracle of salvation (Is 41:8-13) or allegory (Ezek 17:1-21), the principal reference is to the activity of God among his people or among the nations as a whole, and no sermon from the prophetic literature truly deals with those oracles unless it deals with that dynamic of Yahweh's activity.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 229.

¹⁰⁵ Jeremiah 32:42; Isaiah 8:5.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Preaching From Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel", *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, ed. James W. Cox (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 120.

Forth-telling And Foretelling

Forth-telling and foretelling are two major components of biblical prophecy.

Forth-telling relates to messages the prophets directed to their contemporary audience as they addressed the current circumstances facing the people and the nation. Frequently their messages exposed the peoples' covenant unfaithfulness and challenged them to repentance and godly living while warning them of the consequences of judgment. While people often associate foretelling or predictive prophecy as the dominant feature of biblical prophecy the majority of the prophet's ministry was comprised of forth-telling.¹⁰⁷

Foretelling or predictive prophecy was also an important part of the prophet's ministry as God disclosed to the prophet future happenings that were to transpire. Sometimes these predictions entailed a near fulfillment while at other times a more distant fulfillment was in view. These predictions, in keeping with the covenant promises, were frequently warnings of judgment as well as promises of hope and restoration. The prophets declared these realities to their current generation and such foretelling was intended to encourage God's people to pursue faithful covenant living.¹⁰⁸

Prose And Poetry

Prophetic literature is made up mostly of poetry. As a result, when the prophets speak, their speech is often characterized by such features as rhythm and parallelism. This poetic element is one of the key challenges people face in reading and understanding the prophets. Alter provides insight regarding why the prophets relied on poetic

¹⁰⁷ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation Revised and Updated* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 371.

¹⁰⁸ Arnold and Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey*, 343.

expression to such a great extent when he states, "poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communication, not only solemn, weighty, and forceful but also densely woven with complex internal connections, meanings, and implication. [Thus] it makes sense that divine speech should be represented as poetry."¹⁰⁹ However, not everything in the prophets is poetry as only five of the prophetic books are completely written in poetic form, namely, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah.¹¹⁰ One of the helpful clues for the reader is the observation that when the prophets are not directly speaking God's words to the people, those sections will generally be written in prose. In other words, the prophetic speeches will typically be written in poetic form while the narrative or historical sections as well as the biographical and autobiographical accounts will be in prose. Also, generally when God speaks to the prophet prose will be the preferred style of communication.¹¹¹

The Major Literary Forms Of Prophetic Genre

Claus Westermann, who has significantly influenced the study of prophetic genre, identified three major literary forms comprising prophetic speech. These literary forms include "accounts", "speeches" and "prayers."¹¹² Accounts can be understood to be narratives that relate to the prophets while prayers are a record of words spoken by people directed to God. Speeches communicate the words of God or the messages from God spoken by the prophets to the people. These speeches or oracles are one of two

¹⁰⁹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985), 141.

¹¹⁰ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 240.

¹¹¹ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 240; Richard Patterson, "Old Testament Prophecy" in *A Complete Literary Guide To The Bible*, eds. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 305; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 138.

¹¹² Richard Patterson, "Old Testament Prophecy" in *A Complete Literary Guide To The Bible*, 297. See also Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 241.

kinds and they form the backbone of prophetic speech inasmuch as the prophets employ this form more than any other.¹¹³ Speeches or oracles are either judgment speeches or salvation speeches.

Prophetic Speeches Of Judgment

Judgment speeches typically consist of three elements, namely the Messenger Formula, a statement explaining the reason for Yahweh's action(s), and finally a declaration of Yahweh's action.¹¹⁴ Each component part will not always be present and neither will they always appear in a particular order. The messenger formula, identified by such phrases as "Thus says the LORD" or "The LORD spoke to me", reminds the people that the prophet speaks with divine authority.¹¹⁵ The employment of such formulaic expressions were a part of traditional communication in the Ancient Near East as Fee and Stuart confirm when they write, "Such formulae as these were used by messengers in diplomatic and business settings in the ancient world to remind recipients that what they were saying was not something they were making up but was in fact the exact words of the one who had sent them to deliver the message (cf. Num 20:14; 1 Sam 11:9; 2 Sam 11:25)."¹¹⁶ Judgment speeches can be directed against either individuals or nations including both foreign nations as well as God's covenant people. The purpose of such announcements was to inform the subject(s) of the imminent wrath of God or to

¹¹³ Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III, eds., *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 300. See also Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM Press, 1975), 37 and Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 241.

¹¹⁴ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 242; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 300-301.

¹¹⁵ Amos 1:3; Isaiah 8.

¹¹⁶ Fee and Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, 197.

warn them of such judgment in order to induce repentance and avert the punishment.¹¹⁷

Samplings of judgment speeches from the prophecy of Amos include Amos 1:3-5, 6-8, 9-10, 11-12; 13-15; 2:1-3, 4-5, 6-16. Other examples of judgment speeches include passages like Isaiah 14; Hosea 4; Ezekiel 6, 7, 30; and Jeremiah 44:1-6.

Prophetic Speeches Of Salvation

Three key elements also comprise salvation oracles. They include a Messenger formula, a statement of reassurance and finally a description of the future transformation of judgment into salvation and blessing.¹¹⁸ As noted with the judgment speeches, all three elements will not always be included and their order of presentation can be varied. Salvation oracles in Amos are rare but two examples are found in Amos 9:11-15. Other examples of salvation speeches include Jeremiah 32:36-44; Isaiah 2:1-5; Hosea 2:14-23 and Haggai 2:20-23 as well as many others.

Additional Literary Forms Of Prophetic Genre

While judgment and salvation oracles are the main genres by which the prophets communicated their message, within this genre grouping, the prophets utilized a number of additional forms. As Sandy and Giese write, "God did not leave his messengers with a cupboard bare of genres. They incorporated genres from many elements of daily life into their one major genre. The list is virtually endless, complete only when every single narrative about prophets in the Bible is analyzed as well as every single prophetic sermon."¹¹⁹ Since the majority of the prophets' messages were judgment in nature, in

¹¹⁷ D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 22.

¹¹⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching From The Old Testament: A Guide For The Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 110.

¹¹⁹ Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 162.

their creative genius, they used these diverse literary forms available to them in order to capture and keep the attention of the people.¹²⁰ However, the subject-matter was the primary determinative factor for the selection of the form employed.¹²¹

Some of the more frequently employed literary forms in judgment speeches by the prophets include the following forms.

Woe Oracles

Woe oracles are identifiable by the presence of the word "woe" or "alas" which typically occur at the beginning of the speech evoking a sense of dismay or alarm. This pronouncement of woe is followed by a general description of the offensive behavior or an unflattering depiction of the people along with an announcement of the specific judgment they will experience. Woe oracles generally do not include an introductory messenger formula.¹²² Frequently, several woe oracles appear together in the prophetic books as illustrated in Amos 5:18-6:7, Habakkuk 2:6-19, Micah 2:1-5 and Isaiah 5. Oracles of woe provide the prophet a means to communicate God's message of judgment with great intensity and these oracles should be heard as "expressions of prophetic outrage at the sinful behavior they condemn."¹²³

Covenant Lawsuit

Several elements comprise the covenant lawsuit. Firstly, there is the "Opening Appeal" including the call for people to listen and sometimes witnesses are summoned which frequently include the heavens, the earth or the hills. A second element involves

¹²⁰ Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching From The Old Testament*, 101.

¹²¹ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 244.

¹²² Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 362.

¹²³ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 362.

the "Questioning of Motives or Actions" whereby the LORD inquires where He has gone wrong in view of the many great things He has done for His people. Thirdly, "Charges" are brought against God's people which frequently include a summary description of God's faithfulness in contrast to specific covenant violations by His people. Finally, a pronouncement of "Guilt" and "Sentence of Judgment" are pronounced.¹²⁴ Fee and Stuart advocate a similar breakdown identifying the elements of the covenant lawsuit as the summons, charge, evidence and then the verdict.¹²⁵ Every lawsuit will not necessarily contain each of these elements nor will they occur in this precise order. Examples of a covenant lawsuit include Micah 6, Hosea 4 and Jeremiah 2 among others.

Disputation

The goal in a disputation is the same as with the covenant lawsuit, namely to "leave the opponent devoid of further argumentation and resigned to the divine decision."¹²⁶ Typically, a disputation consists of three components, namely, a "declaration, discussion and refutation."¹²⁷ Disputations frequently employ rhetorical questions as a means of drawing in the listening audience. The prophet Malachi effectively uses disputations employing a series of rhetorical questions in order to communicate his message to the people. Also, the book of Habakkuk can be considered as a lengthy disputation as Habakkuk's complaint against God receives a response that

¹²⁴ For varied descriptions of the elements comprising covenant lawsuits see Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 163; Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 367-368; VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 400-402.

¹²⁵ Fee and Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, 194.

¹²⁶ Ryken and Longman, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 303.

¹²⁷ Ryken and Longman, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 303. See also Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 366 for alternate headings and descriptions. An alternate three-fold breakdown of a disputation includes "statement of the thesis under dispute, statement of the proposed counterthesis, and the actual argumentation in its favor."

results in the prophet's expression of worship and submission. An example of a disputation in the prophecy of Amos is found in Amos 3:3-8.

Funeral Lament Or Dirge

A funeral lament or dirge effectively employed by the prophet had a jolting effect on his audience. Greidanus states, "This form was well-suited for shocking carefree Israel into an awareness of their precarious position before God and in the world."¹²⁸ Key elements of the prophetic dirge include a "call to hear, the dirge, a messenger formula and then a prediction."¹²⁹ Amos 5:1-3 is a powerful illustration of an effective dirge that would have surprised the nation of Israel who believed their current experience evidenced God's pleasure with them. However, Israel's distorted perspective can be seen as one traces the elements of Amos' dirge in the following breakdown: the call to hear (5:1); the dirge (5:2); the messenger formula (5:3a) and the prediction (5:3b). Additional examples of a dirge are found in Isaiah 14:4-21; Jeremiah 9:17-22.

Oracles Against Foreign Nations

An oracle against foreign nations is a literary form frequently employed by the prophets. "In the Major Prophets alone, over 25 chapters and 680 verses (a bulk of material that exceeds all the chapters and verses in all of the apostle Paul's prison epistles!) are given over to this one literary form (Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32). One could also add Amos 1-2 and the entire Books of Nahum and Obadiah."¹³⁰ Oracles against nations announce a message of judgment against nations and they serve not only

¹²⁸ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 244.

¹²⁹ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 363.

¹³⁰ Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching From The Old Testament*, 111.

to demonstrate that God will hold them accountable for their actions but to assure God's covenant people of His protection. While the persons addressed are foreigners these oracles were probably delivered in an Israelite context and for the benefit of God's people. As a result, "This means that overt announcements of judgment may function as indirect announcements of salvation for Israel."¹³¹ The Abrahamic covenant, where God promises to bless those who bless God's people and curse those who curse them, forms the theological basis for the oracles of judgment against the nations.

Prophetic Narratives

The prophetic narratives found in the prophetic books are of two different kinds. The vocation reports, previously identified as "call narratives", tell the story of the prophet's call and commission.¹³² Examples of such call narratives are found in Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 1-3 and Amos 7:14-15. These types of narratives affirm the legitimacy of the prophets' call and his authorization to speak for God.

The second type of prophetic narrative details instructions associated with symbolic actions that the prophet was to enact.¹³³ Jeremiah's instruction to bury and then dig up again the linen belt in Perath; Hosea's instruction to marry Gomer the prostitute; as well as Ezekiel's activities are all illustrations of this second type of narrative which are frequently found in the prophetic books.¹³⁴ Typically these narratives serve to illustrate and reinforce the theme of the prophet's message found throughout the book.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 164.

¹³² Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 369.

¹³³ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 370.

¹³⁴ Jeremiah 13; Hosea 1:2-9; Ezekiel 4-5.

¹³⁵ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 370; Ryken and Longman, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 304.

Vision Reports

Prophetic vision reports are reports of things the prophet "saw or heard that convey God's message" and this genre is recognizable by the occurrence of such terms or phrases as "see", "made to see" or "and behold" which is typically followed by a recounting of the vision.¹³⁶ Sometimes vision reports utilize normal everyday objects, like the figs in Jeremiah 28 or the plumb line in Amos 7, which becomes the catalyst for the prophet to announce a prophetic word from the Lord. Sometimes the vision report is more highly sophisticated as in apocalyptic literature where unusual creatures and images are depicted having eschatological cosmic implications wherein a special angelic messenger reveals God's intent and revelation to the prophet, who then communicates the received revelation.¹³⁷

In summary, sensitivity to the elements of prophetic genre and the various literary forms the prophets employed to communicate their message is essential for the preacher when preaching from the prophetic books. Awareness of the genre and the literary forms will enable the preacher to better understand the message of the text. These literary realities will also impact the sermon form used by the preacher in order to most effectively communicate the message of the prophetic text.

In this chapter consideration has been given to the importance of the context of the ministry of the prophets. The relationship of the various prophets to each other is seen when examining the biblical context. The historical and geopolitical context in

¹³⁶ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 369.

¹³⁷ Ryken and Longman, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 305; Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 369.

which each prophet ministered is crucial to understanding the circumstances and nuances of the prophet's ministry. Finally, the literary context with special attention to the key elements of the prophetic genre is paramount to understanding the messages of the prophets.

CHAPTER FOUR

A SEMINAR ON HOW TO EFFECTIVELY PREPARE EXPOSITIONAL SERMONS FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS FOR A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AUDIENCE FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE PREACHERS USING AMOS AS A CASE STUDY

This chapter will adapt the material from the previous two chapters into a seminar designed to be presented to current and future preachers as a means of further equipping them to effectively prepare expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets for a twenty-first century audience. The book of Amos will be used as a test case illustrating the application of the key elements of this project in the process of compiling an expositional sermon from the Minor Prophets. A summary of the goals for this seminar as well as suggestions for where the seminar could be presented will be clearly stated. Two separate handouts will then be included of the seminar content, namely a "Presenter's Edition" and a "Participant's Edition." The Presenter's edition will contain the same basic content as the participant's version but additional information will be incorporated in order to aid the presenter in communicating the material. The additional information will be identified by being placed within textboxes or in italics.

Goals Of The Seminar

This seminar is intended for current or future preachers who have completed an introductory course in homiletics. At the conclusion of the seminar, participants should be able to:

1. Explain the important contribution that the historical and cultural context plays in understanding the ministry and message of the prophets by being able to identify Israel's king during the ministry of Amos and why he was able to lead his kingdom to a time of prosperity.

2. Describe the importance of identifying the spiritual challenges confronting God's people and how these issues impact the prophet's ministry by identifying the three key spiritual challenges Amos faced.
3. Identify four important considerations in the exegetical and hermeneutical process of unearthing the prophet's message and applying it to people today.
4. Explain the important contribution prophetic genre plays in crafting expositional sermons from the prophetic books by identifying the two major types of prophetic speech and their key elements and by identifying four other literary forms found in the prophetic books.

Potential Opportunities For Presenting This Seminar

The seminar is arranged into four, fifty-minute teaching segments and could easily be expanded into lengthier segments if desirable. In its design the seminar would ideally fit in a formal education context either in a Bible College or seminary setting. Within an educational context it would fit best into a senior preaching course such as an offering on "Genre Sensitive Preaching" since the seminar assumes an understanding of the basic skills of composing a sermon and terminology gained from an introductory homiletics course.

Alternately, this seminar would be suitable to be taught in a less formal context where pastors or future preachers desired to benefit from a personal enrichment series. It could be taught at a denominational or regional pastor's conference in which various workshops were presented and the seminar could be offered as a special track consisting of multiple sessions.

Additionally, the seminar could also be offered through a local ministerial group.

The Class Handout

The material for this seminar will be made available to the participants in the form of a handout.¹ Two editions of the handout form the majority content of this chapter and are presented herein as supplementary editions. Supplementary Edition 4.1 is designed for the presenter. It includes the presenter's copy with additional instructional material. The additional content designed for the presenter will contain information to assist him or her in introducing new sections, providing transitions as well as underscoring key concepts to be emphasized. References will also be included directing the presenter back to the previous chapters in the Thesis-Project where the core content is found. The anecdotal material including quotations are intended as resources and can be replaced by other material that the presenter may choose to incorporate in their place.

The participant's copy, Supplementary Edition 4.2 contains some scripted material but can be easily adapted to fill in the blank format if the presenter prefers. A partial bibliography is included as an additional resource for the participants. Both editions of the handouts are designed to be copied or printed as is for the convenience of both the presenter and the participants.

¹ Since the material is designed in the form of a handout the formatting style will not correspond to the earlier content in the Thesis-Project. Both the Presenter's and the Participant's edition are intended to be stand alone documents copy or print-ready for distribution in real teaching sessions.

SUPPLEMENT 4.1 – CLASS HANDOUT (PRESENTER'S COPY)

Session 1: THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF AMOS

The presenter can draw on Chapter 2, pages 6-9 and Chapter 3, pages 83-91 for details on this section. Additional material from this section can be incorporated into the outline at the discretion of the presenter.

Goals:

At the end of this session each participant should be able to explain the important contribution that the historical and geopolitical context plays in understanding the ministry and message of the prophets by being able to:

1. Identify the four dominant world powers during the time of the Minor Prophets
2. Identify Israel's king who was reigning during Amos' ministry and why the political context of his time allowed him to lead his kingdom to a time of economic prosperity and political expansion and stability.

It is helpful to know that there were only four dominant powers during the time of the prophet's ministry.

I. Four Primary World Powers Dominated The Geopolitical Landscape Of The Ancient Near East During The Time Of The Minor Prophets.

A. Assyria, Babylon and Persia

These three nations were located to the north of Israel. Assyria and Babylon occupied the area today identified as Iraq while Persia is linked with modern day Iran.

B. Egypt was located to the south of Israel and was the dominant southern power. Due to Egypt's close geographical proximity to Judah it often exerted a powerful influence in the southern kingdom. (Cox 1983, 138)

C. Summary Quote

Petersen (Thesis-Project ch3, p83) provides a helpful summary when he writes that during the time of Amos, whom he regards as the earliest of the twelve Minor Prophets, that:

Israel and Judah lay on the western perimeter of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Late in the seventh century, that Mesopotamian power fell to

another, the Neo-Babylonians. Then, midway through the sixth century, Persia, an empire with its roots to the east of Mesopotamia, decimated the Babylonians. Each of these empires at one time or another placed troops in Syria-Palestine. Life in both Israel and Judah was thus, in considerable measure, a function of foreign imperial activity. The Neo-Assyrian empire destroyed Israel in 721, the Neo-Babylonian Empire destroyed Judah in 587, and the Persian Empire allowed for and funded partially the rebuilding of Judah as a province within the empire. Each of these three nodal moments receives attention in the Twelve. (Petersen 2002, 171)

II. Summary And Chart Of The Minor Prophets And Dominant Powers

Understanding the geopolitical context of the world scene is essential to appreciating both the message of the prophets and the challenges they faced.

For the pre-exilic prophets the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were major issues impacting their ministries as the threat of captivity and potential national extinction were almost always a present reality for Israel and Judah. (Cox 1983, 138)

For the post-exilic prophets, the rise and subsequent dominance of the Persian empire following the demise of the Babylonians forms an important background to their ministries.

Review and provide copies of Tables 1, 2 and 3 from pages 79, 80 and 84, which depicts the ministry of the prophets in relation to the Babylonian exile, the primary nations the prophets addressed in their ministries and the dominant world powers during the ministries of the various prophets.

III. The Historical And Geopolitical Context Of The Ministry Of Amos

A. Amos' Ministry And The Reign Of King Jeroboam II

1. Amos 1:1 places Amos' ministry during the reign of King Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.) of Israel and King Uzziah (783-742 B.C.) of Judah.
2. King Jeroboam II's reign was a time of political stability, economic prosperity and geographical expansion.

A review of the historical and geopolitical context of the reign of Jeroboam II confirms why Jeroboam II was able to lead Israel in a time of great political stability and economic prosperity. We will now demonstrate that a major reason accounting for Jeroboam II's success was due to what was happening within the Assyrian empire. Additionally, we will see that Israel's relationship with their neighbor Syria and the rivaled southern kingdom of Judah were significant factors contributing to Israel's stability.

B. The Neo-Assyrian Empire And Israel In The Days Of Jeroboam II

The Neo-Assyrian empire extends from 745-612 B.C. and is important to the biblical landscape in which some of the prophets ministered and it is during this time that the empire reached its zenith. (Kaiser 1998, 357; Tenney 1977, 372)

Prior to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian empire, Assyria had experienced a decline following the death of Tiglath-Pileser I who reigned in Assyria from 1116-1076 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser I expanded the borders of Assyria more than any of their previous leaders. Under his leadership Assyria extended its reach as far west as the coast of Syria.

Subsequent to the death of Tiglath-Pileser I, Assyria experienced a period of decline. While Assyria remained the dominant power, the Arameans in the west were able to establish a kingdom with its center in Damascus. They were also able to exert pressure on the borders of Assyria. (Tenney 1977, 374-376)

Assyria rose to prominence again during the rule of a series of individuals beginning with Ashur-dan II (933-910 B.C.) and extending through to Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.). Shalmaneser III was effective in leading Assyria in a period of expansion. (Tenney 1977, 376)

However, towards the end of the reign of Shalmaneser III the empire experienced a period of internal dissent and weakened leadership. As a result, Assyria was not an immediate threat to Israel in the early part of the eighth century. Due to both the internal and external pressures exerted on the empire Assyria was not in a position to seek to expand her empire. Instead, she had to focus on securing what she already had. (Appendix F, Map of Assyrian Empire; Tenney 1977, 376; Paul 1991, 1-2; Kaiser 1998, 357)

A weakened Assyria enabled Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.) to lead the northern kingdom through a time of stability, expansion and prosperity. This record of expansion and prosperity is the context for the ministry of Amos and the messages he delivered as the following historical summary substantiates.

C. The Relationship Between Syria And Israel In The Days Of Jeroboam II

In addition, to the larger powers of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt, the smaller nation of Syria was frequently a frustrating neighbor to the north of Israel. While there were occasions in which a common adversary compelled them to cooperate together, overall, the relationship between Israel and Syria was adversarial as the following biblical passages confirm.

1. Prior to King Jeroboam II Israel experienced adversity by the Syrians.

Israel during the reigns of King Jehu (841-814 B.C.) and King Jehoahaz (814-798 B.C.) was dominated by Syria. (Kaiser 1998, 347)

- a. Syria dominated Israel in the reign of King Jehu.

2 Kings 10:32

"In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the Valley of the Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan."

- b. Syria dominated Israel in the reign of King Jehoahaz.

2 Kings 13:3, 7 records events during the reign of King Jehoahaz.

"And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael ... For there was not left to Jehoahaz an army of more than fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing."

2 Kings 13:22-23

"Now Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now."

2. In response to King Jehoahaz' prayer the LORD delivered Israel from Syria by the intervention of the Assyrians.

2 Kings 13:4-5

"Then Jehoahaz sought the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them. Therefore the LORD gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly."

History confirms that Assyria was the "savior" provided by the LORD as Adad-Nirari III defeated Damascus in 802 B.C. and placed Ben-Hadad II, Aram's ruler, under a heavy tax. (Smith & Page 1995, 25)

3. Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz became king of Israel in 801 B.C. and began to rebuild the kingdom of Israel.

2 Kings 13:24-25

"When Hazael king of Syria died, Ben-hadad his son became king in his place. Then Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again from Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities that he had taken from Jehoahaz his father in war. Three

times Joash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel."

D. The Relationship Between Judah And Israel In The Days Of Jeroboam II

Israel under King Jehoahaz had begun the process of rebuilding the northern kingdom by recapturing territory formerly under their possession and also by exerting dominance over the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 14:1-14). These two actions prepared the way for King Jeroboam II and King Uzziah to live peaceably for the next several years.

With Assyria's power weakened and Syria now dominated by Israel, both the northern kingdom of Israel and Judah entered into a period of great prosperity; economic prosperity and political stability.

E. During The Reign Of King Jeroboam II Israel Enjoyed Forty Years Of Non-interference By The Assyrians And Experienced Political Stability And Economic Prosperity.

1. The weakened Assyrian empire provided a time of unprecedented opportunity for Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II. There were strong Assyrian leaders prior to Jeroboam II and there would be strong leaders following his death. However, during his reign Assyria's weaker leaders made them more vulnerable and necessitated the need for them to focus on the territory already under their control. As a result, Israel was free from Assyrian threat during the reign of Jeroboam II.
2. During the reign of Jeroboam II Israel was also free from the domination of Syria who were under the control of Assyria.
3. Israel and Judah lived peaceably during the reign of Jeroboam II.
4. The stability characterizing King Jeroboam II's reign allowed the kingdom to geographically expand.

2 Kings 14:25-27

"He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash."

Of this time period the commentator Paul writes, "During this period, the Silver Age of Israelite history, Israel reached the summit of its material power

and economical prosperity as well as the apogee of its territorial expansion, comparable only to the era of David and Solomon, the Golden Age." (Paul 1991, 1)

5. The expanded geographical kingdom yielded economic gains resulting in major economic prosperity for the northern kingdom as indicated in the prophecy of Amos.
6. Regarding the feats of Jeroboam II, Kaiser states, "In less than twenty-five years Jeroboam II was able to take a nation that was just about ready to die and turn it into one of the great powers of his day." (Kaiser 1998, 352)

Conclusion:

The lack of a dominant foreign national threat, especially the non-interference of the Assyrians combined with the peaceful coexistence between Israel and Judah during the reign of Jeroboam II, provided a time of stability for the northern kingdom resulting in economic prosperity and geographic expansion for the kingdom. This historical and geopolitical context helps account for some of the spiritual issues which emerged during this time period which Amos addressed in his prophecy.

SUPPLEMENT 4.1 - CLASS HANDOUT (PRESENTER'S COPY)

Session 2: THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES CONFRONTING GOD'S PEOPLE IN AMOS

Goals:

At the end of this session each participant should be able to describe the importance of identifying the spiritual challenges confronting God's people and how these issues impact the prophet's ministry by being able to identify the three key spiritual challenges Amos addressed in his prophecy.

Transition to Session Two

Having surveyed the historical and cultural realities of Amos' time you can then transition to the second session in which you will consider the important spiritual struggles facing God's people during Amos' ministry.

The passages that the presenter will refer to in this section illustrating the major spiritual issues are found in the exegesis of Amos in chapter 2. Major passages that can be used to illustrate the problem of social injustice include 2:6-7; 4:1; 5:11-12; 8:4-6. Consult this section in the Thesis-Project on pages 28-31, 38-39, 44-45, 62-63 as preparation for reviewing these passages. Also consult the background comments for these three major sins found in chapter 2, pages 9-10 and chapter 3, pages 91-93.

Introduction

There are three major sins confronting God's people which Amos addresses in his book and the seriousness of these sins account for why God's judgment must come upon His covenant people.

The first major issue confronting God's people is the sin of Social Injustice.

I. Amos Confronts The Sin Of Social Injustice.

Social injustice is a key matter that Amos references frequently throughout his prophecy.

Use the following quote by Chisholm which helps explain why social injustice was so prevalent in the days of Amos.

A. What Accounts For The Prevalence Of Social Injustice In Amos' Day?

A royal military bureaucracy ruled Israel at this time. As this bureaucracy expanded it acquired more and more land and gradually commandeered the economy and legal system. At various administrative levels, it invited bribery and other dishonest practices. The common people outside the administrative

centers, through confiscatory taxation, conscription, excessive interest rates, and other oppressive measures, were gradually disenfranchised and lost their landed property and, with it, their means of survival and their rights as citizens. (Chisholm 2002, 385)

B. Key Passages In Amos Addressing Social Injustice

1. Observations from Amos 2:6-7

*The presenter should draw on notes from chapter 2, pages 28-31.
Set the context for the participants by explaining that this message is the last in a series of eight judgment speeches and the list climaxes with this message of judgment against Israel.
Draw attention to the fact that social injustice is the first crime that Amos levels against Israel.
List the specific examples of social injustice from the text.
Review the covenant provisions for how the poor and the vulnerable were to be treated (Exodus 21:2-11; 22:25-27; Deuteronomy 15:12-18) and yet how these stipulations were being ignored in Amos' day. See chapter 2, page 29.
Invite the participants to consider and discuss how we tend to view the seriousness of the violent crime of the Ammonites of 1:13 in ripping open the pregnant women in Gilead compared to the social justice crimes of Israel; i.e. do we view social injustice to be less important than the violent acts perpetrated by the Ammonites?*

2. Observations from Amos 4:1-3

*The presenter should draw on notes from chapter 2, pages 38-40.
Draw the participants' attention to the relationship between materialism and social injustice but keep your commentary minimal since the problem of materialism will be more fully discussed under a separate heading.
Draw attention to the relationship between social injustice and the promise of exile which reveals the serious nature of the sin of social injustice from God's perspective.*

3. Observations from Amos 5:11-12, 14

*The presenter should draw on notes from chapter 2, pages 44-45.
Review the examples of social injustice from the text in v11.
Observe the irony of God's judgment against the elite which fits their crime.
Draw attention to the injustice that was present in society in which the vulnerable were denied legal recourse in v12.*

Emphasize that evidence of the elite turning and "seeking good and not evil" was to be demonstrated by them having a concern that justice would be meted out in the courts v14.

Emphasize that a litmus test for covenant faithfulness in the prophets is caring for the oppressed including the widow, the alien and the orphan (Jeremiah 7:5-6; 22:3; Zechariah 7:9-10).

4. Observations from Amos 8:4-6

The presenter should draw on exegetical notes from chapter 2, page 62-63.

Draw attention to the fact that these verses present in succinct form the three major sins characterizing Israel which we are dealing with in this seminar. The efficiency with which Amos summarizes their actions serves as a precursor to the consequence of judgment that dominates 8:7-14.

C. Israel's Social Injustice Is Offensive To God And Would Result In His Judgment Of Exile.

As the presenter reviews the observations gleaned from these passages on the sin of social injustice they will need to emphasize the importance of God's perspective of this sin and crime. He is offended by the sin of social injustice and announced judgment upon His people including the ultimate covenant curse of exile.

II. Amos Confronts The Sin Of Materialism.

A. There Is A Relationship Between Israel's Social Injustice And Their Greed.

The practice of social injustice was motivated by the greed and insatiable appetite for more by Israel's wealthy and powerful. The economic prosperity experienced during Jeroboam II's reign contributed to the affluence of the people. Like Ecclesiastes 5:10 states, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income ..." and the elite of Amos' day demonstrated this reality. They perceived that their desire to experience and have more was a pursuit to be engaged in regardless of who was hurt or oppressed in the process.

It is important to clarify that the issue is not so much materialism per se but the fact that the people were guilty of pursuing materialism at any cost. God promised in the covenant material wealth and blessing for faithful obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). However, the covenant did not legitimize unethical behavior in order for God's people to pursue materialistic greed.

B. Key Passages In Amos Addressing Materialism

Amos addresses the problem of materialism in several passages in his prophecy. The presenter should draw on the exegesis of these passages from chapter 2 of the Thesis-Project on pages 37-38, 49-54, 62-63.

1. Observations from Amos 3:15

The presenter should draw on notes from chapter 2, pages 37-38. The presenter's major focus from this text will be on providing an explanation of the winter and summer houses which further illustrates the wealth of the new upper middle class that had emerged in Israelite society and the luxury and wealthy lifestyle of the elite.

2. Observations from 6:1-14

The presenter will draw on notes from chapter 2, pages 49-54. Emphasize that this message begins with a pronouncement of woe which reflects a serious, somber tone from the LORD. Draw attention to the relationship between materialism and the spirit of complacency, smugness and false sense of security that Amos addresses. Review the description of these people's lifestyle which was characterized by the kind of materialism and luxury usually associated with royalty. Since Israel perceived these benefits as evidence of God's pleasure they were blinded by their susceptibility to God's judgment.

3. Observations from 8:4-6

The presenter will draw on notes from chapter 2, page 62-63. This passage reveals the people's insatiable appetite for material gain regardless of how it affected other people and even if it meant violating their covenant responsibilities to Yahweh.

III. Amos Confronts The Sin Of Hypocritical Ritualistic Worship.

The presenter will draw on the comments regarding hypocritical worship in the summary provided under "The Religious Context" of Israel in chapter 2 of the Thesis-Project pages 9-10 as well as in chapter 3, pages 91-93. Additionally, consult the exegesis in chapter 2 of the Thesis-Project for any of the biblical passages in Amos addressing the peoples' hypocritical worship.

The practice of social injustice motivated by greed demonstrated how God's people were violating the covenant. Despite these covenant offenses the people continued to engage in worship thinking that God would be pleased with them. However, they were guilty of hypocritical worship; a sin which Amos exposed and addressed numerous times in his prophecy.
We will consider two major aspects of Israel's hypocritical worship.

A. Israel Practiced A Syncretistic Worship Which Blended The Worship Of Baal And The Worship Of Yahweh.

Syncretism is defined as "the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion." (dictionary.com)
Syncretism is the merging together of more than one belief system and in Amos' day Israel had merged together the worship of Baal and the worship of Yahweh.

The corrupt, hypocritical worship characterizing Israel in the days of Amos was the result of seeds that were planted much earlier in their history. Israel had a long-standing fascination with idolatry and the worship of Baal as a brief survey of their history reveals.

For this summary, the Presenter should draw on comments from the Thesis-Project found in chapter 2, pages 9-10 and chapter 3, pages 91-92.

1. An overview of Israel's fascination with idolatry and Baal worship
 - a. Exodus 32
Israel brought their idolatrous tendencies with them from Egypt and it clearly demonstrated itself when Aaron built the Golden Calf.
 - b. Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:1-10
Moses commanded against marrying foreign women warning that peoples' hearts would be divided between worshiping Yahweh and the gods of foreigners. This warning proved true as evidenced in the experience of King Solomon.
 - c. 1 Kings 11-12
Upon the division of the kingdom King Jeroboam I introduced a new corrupt worship system which included worship centers established in both ends of the kingdom, Dan to the north and Bethel to the south, as well as the establishment of a new non-Levitical priesthood.

- d. 1 Kings 16:29-34
King Ahab and Queen Jezebel built a temple in Samaria devoted to the worship of Baal.
 - e. 1 Kings 18:13-19
Baal worship flourished as it was embraced both by the leadership and common people
 - f. 1 Kings 19:18; 2 Kings 10:18-20
Resistance to Baal worship was practiced both by Elijah and by King Jehu
 - g. Summary
Despite these resistances against Baal worship it continued to be practiced and a syncretistic worship blending Baal worship and the worship of Yahweh was present in the days of Amos.
2. A Summary of the Key Elements of Baal Worship
The following summary of the key elements of Baal worship in Israel in the days of Amos underscores its offensiveness to Yahweh and the unfaithfulness of God's covenant people.

The god Baal was but one of a pantheon of deities worshiped by the Canaanites. As the son of El and Asherah, he was the rain and storm god whose chief concerns were agricultural fertility and sexual reproduction among, animals and humankind. Mot, the god of sterility and death was Baal's eternal rival. According to Canaanite mythology, the season of rain and plenty and drought and famine were the consequence of the perpetual conflict between Baal and Mot.

To aid Baal in his struggle against the god Mot, Canaanite worship of the storm god included human sacrifice and ritual prostitution (cf. Ps. 106:34-41; Deut. 23:17). These male and female prostitutes were employed by the local shrines and were considered "priests" and "priestesses" of the gods. The people of Canaan engaged in sacred sexual intercourse with the cult prostitutes as part of Baal worship to ensure fertility by reenacting sacramentally the god's marriage to the land as Baal (or "lord, husband") of the earth ... Unsure if they could trust Yahweh for the rain necessary for life in Palestine, Israel chose to mix Yahwism and Baalism in a syncretistic religion. (Hill & Walton 2009, 589-591)

The second major aspect of Israel's hypocritical worship relates to their mechanistic view of God which enabled them to engage in the worship of Yahweh while living in disobedience to the LORD.

B. Israel's Mechanistic View Of God Enabled Them To Engage In The Worship Of Yahweh While Living In Disobedience To The LORD.

There was a profound disconnect between Israel's worship and their lifestyle. Israel perceived that as long as they brought their sacrifices to Yahweh, He would be pleased even if they engaged in disobedience to the LORD in other areas of their life.

This disconnect is seen most clearly when we examine some of the key passages in Amos which addresses Israel's worship.

C. Key Passages In Amos Addressing Israel's Hypocritical Worship

1. Observations from Amos 2:8

The presenter should draw on the exegetical notes for this text found in chapter 2 pages 31-32.

Emphasize how this passage illustrates that Israel continued to worship Yahweh while engaged in covenant violations involving social injustice.

2. Observations from Amos 4:4-5

The presenter can draw on the exegetical notes for this passage from chapter 2, pages 40-41.

Emphasize the disconnect between Israel's perspective and God's perspective on the value of their worship. The Israelites frequented the worship centers and even exceeded the number of sacrifices and tithes that were required, thinking that God would be pleased. However, they would have been shocked when God invited them to come to their worship centers and increase their sinning by engaging in their hypocritical worship.

3. Observations from Amos 5:18-27

The presenter will draw on the exegetical commentary provided in chapter 2, pages 46-49 in order to explain the highlights of this section.

Emphasize Israel's misunderstanding of their predicament before the LORD as evidenced in their perception of the Day of the Lord not realizing that it was going to be a time of judgment for them (5:18-20).

They perceived that God was pleased with them including their worship of Him. Draw attention to the LORD's strong, explicit statement in His rejection of their worship (21-23) and His longing for them to be marked by love and to be committed to social justice for their fellow man (24).

Emphasize also the explicit reference to the judgment of exile which awaits the Northern Kingdom (5:27). The judgment of exile underscores the seriousness with which the LORD regards the offensiveness of Israel's defective worship of Himself.

4. Observations from Amos 8:5a

The presenter should draw on the explanatory notes from chapter 2, pages 62-65. Draw attention to the fact that Israel's hypocritical worship highlighted in 8:5a is placed between their crimes of social injustice and materialistic greed (8:4, 6). Emphasize how this text illustrates once again the disconnect that exists between their worship and their unethical behavior as evidenced in their violations of the covenant.

Conclusion:

These three major sins of social injustice, materialistic greed and ritualistic/hypocritical worship are themes which weave their way through the prophecy of Amos. The prophet consistently warns Israel of future divine judgment climaxing with the penalty of exile if they fail to repent (cf. 8:7-14).

In preaching the book of Amos, the preacher will be sensitive to the presence of these major sins in our culture and therefore their relevancy for today's audience.

SUPPLEMENT 4.1 - CLASS HANDOUT (PRESENTER'S COPY)

Session 3: THE LITERARY GENRES OF THE BIBLE AND KEY ELEMENTS OF PROPHETIC GENRE

Transition to Session Three

As the presenter transitions to Session Three they can say something like the following:

"In our third session we will consider the literary genres of the Bible and the impact that the genre makes in communicating the message of the biblical text. A special focus will be given to the distinctive elements which comprise the prophetic genre."

Goals:

At the conclusion of this session the participants should appreciate the significant contribution that genre makes in communicating the message of the text by being able to:

1. Identify at least four different kinds of genre comprising biblical literature.
2. Identify at least four distinctive elements of prophetic genre.

Introduction

The presenter can use the following illustration as a way of introducing the importance of genre in understanding literature.

You lift the lid of your mailbox and see the envelope that says Revenue Canada (U.S. instructors substitute IRS or the appropriate equivalent designation). Unless it's your overdue rebate cheque, up go your defenses along with the shiver up your back! Imagine on the other hand, a long-awaited letter that arrives from your daughter, who has headed off to trek through West Africa, who you haven't heard from for two months; you can't wait to rip that envelope open and read everything she has to say as you hang on her every word. Or remember what it was like when you would visit grandpa and grandma's. You'd climb up on to the old, spindly, rocking chair, that you wondered, after all these years of wear and tear, how it was able to hold both of you, and you sit on grandma's knee and she would read you your favorite story that began, "Once upon a time." You loved that fairy-tale story ending! And when she had barely finished reading it through you said, "Read it again!" And then there's mom who after a hard day of running the house and looking after the kids, makes her way to the living room, flops down into the lazy-boy, grabs the paper and immediately turns to the comics ready to relax for the evening by beginning with a good laugh. Or dad who picks up the joke book which says, "Did you hear about the woman who was on a trip around the world?"

Within the normal routines of daily living we encounter various types of communication; different literary genres, whether it is government notices, postcards, newspaper articles or joke books. So also, within the Bible we find various literary types of communication as the following verses reflect.

"In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins..." Ephesians 1:7

"That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him." Mark 4:35-36 NIV

"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." Psalms 2:1-3

"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense. All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you." Song of Solomon 4:1-7

"A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads." Revelation 12:1-3

The Bible is a wonderful, inspired, literary mosaic comprised of a variety of genres.

I. The Bible As Literature

A. The Bible Is God's Truth To Us Presented Creatively And Artistically.

The author of Ecclesiastes presents us with a theory of writing that is found throughout the Bible.

"The teacher searched *to find just the right words*, and what he wrote was *upright and true*." Ecclesiastes 12:10 NIV (italics added)

"The Preacher sought to find *delightful words* and to write *words of truth correctly*." Ecclesiastes 12:10 NASB (italics added)

The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that the Bible is God's truth *and* the Bible is literature and *since* the Bible is literature it *must* be read and understood as such.

C. S. Lewis writes: "There is a sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are." (Lewis 1962, 10)

This means that in addition to studying the Bible theologically and historically, a literary approach is also essential to the process.

II. The Major Genres Of The Bible

While the Bible contains a varied mixture of genres, the dominant literary genres are story or narrative, poetry, proverb and visionary writings (which includes prophecy and apocalypse). (Ryken 1984, 26)

III. Genre Defined And Described

David Aune provides a helpful definition of genre when he states, "A literary genre may be defined as a group of texts that exhibit a coherent and recurring configuration of literary features involving form (including structure and style), content and function." (Aune 1987, 13)

Leland Ryken provides a functional description of a literary genre when he indicates that it is nothing less than a "norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text." (Ryken 1984, 25)

Stated even more simply a "genre is the literary term for a type or kind of writing." (Ryken 1992, 14)

IV. The Importance Of Genre

A. Genre Is Part Of The Message.

Understanding genre is important because the genre determines how the literature is to be read and how it is to be understood.

The genre impacts not only *what* is being said but *how* it is being said.

The genre not only conveys a message but it is actually part of the message.

For example, what would happen if you read the Revenue Canada tax invoice the way you read the comic strips? Or what if you read the affectionate letter from your only daughter the way you read the joke book? Something definitely would get lost in the translation; so also, with the Bible.

You do not interpret Luke's gospel the same way as you interpret Solomon's wise sayings to his son; or Paul's instruction to Timothy the same way as you do the lover's description of his bride in Song of Solomon...at least you shouldn't. It is not the way it was meant to be understood ... or read.

B. Genre Determines How The Text Is To Be Understood.

Each genre is characterized by distinctive features and there are therefore specific rules or guidelines to be followed when one interprets a text from a respective genre. Identifying and understanding the various literary genres prepares the reader for how the text is to be read and interpreted.

C. The Implications Of Prophetic Genre

When it comes to the prophetic books, we must be sensitive to the prophetic genre and various literary forms that are at work. Because as we have previously stated, "The genre not only conveys a message; it is actually part of the message."

And so, we want to provide an overview of some of the distinctive elements which comprise the prophetic genre that the preacher needs to be aware of and sensitive to in order to correctly understand and appreciate the prophet's message.

V. General Characteristics Of Prophetic Genre

A. The Prophets Were Theocentric.

The primary function of a prophet was to declare a message that not only had God as its source but also its subject.

Greidanus writes, "Biblical scholars generally agree that prophets were messengers of God, heralds who delivered a communication from God...The message of the prophets was not only a message *from* God, however, but also a message *about* God, his covenant, his will, his judgment, his redemption, his coming kingdom." (Greidanus 1988, 229)

The prophets were careful to emphasize that their words were not of human origin but were in fact that very words of God. The frequent messenger formulas employed such as "This is what the LORD says" (Jeremiah 32:42) and "The LORD spoke to me again" (Isaiah 8:5) convey the authority by which they spoke.

However, not only are their words divine in origin but they are also centered on

God. The messages of the prophets were Theo-centric. Elizabeth Achtemeier in speaking about the varied forms the prophets used in declaring their message affirms that their message was always centered on God. She writes,

This form [of prophetic oracle] undergoes wide variations in the Major Prophets ... but the emphasis on God's activity remains, and is present in all the principal genres of prophetic literature. Whether the form is that of woe oracle pronounced over the dead (Is 5:8-10) legal procedure (Is 41:21-24), parable (Is. 5:1-7), lamenting dirge (Jer 9:17-22) prophetic torah or teaching (Is 1:10-17), salvation oracle (Jer 35:18-19), priestly oracle of salvation (Is 41:8-13) or allegory (Ezek 7:1-21), the principal reference is to the activity of God among his people or among the nations as a whole, and no sermon from the prophetic literature truly deals with those oracles unless it deals with that dynamic of Yahweh's activity. (Cox 1983, 120)

B. Forth-telling And Foretelling

Forth-telling and foretelling are two major components of biblical prophecy.

1. Forth-telling

Forth-telling relates to messages the prophets directed to their contemporary audience as they addressed the current circumstances facing the people and the nation.

Frequently their messages exposed the peoples' covenant unfaithfulness and challenged them to repentance and godly living while warning them of the consequences of judgment.

While people often associate foretelling or predictive prophecy as the dominant feature of biblical prophecy the majority of the prophet's ministry was comprised of forth-telling. (Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard 2004, 371)

2. Foretelling

Foretelling or predictive prophecy was also an important part of the prophet's ministry as God disclosed to the prophet future happenings that were to transpire.

Sometimes these predictions entailed a near fulfillment while at other times a more distant fulfillment was in view.

These predictions in keeping with the covenant promises were frequently warnings of judgment as well as promises of hope and restoration. The prophets declared these realities to their current generation and such foretelling was intended to encourage God's people to pursue faithful covenant living.

C. Prose And Poetry

Prophetic literature is made up mostly of poetry. As a result, when the prophets speak, their speech is often characterized by such features as rhythm and parallelism. This poetic element is one of the key challenges people face in reading and understanding the prophets.

Robert Alter provides insight regarding why the prophets relied on poetic expression to such a great extent when he states, "poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communication, not only solemn, weighty, and forceful but also densely woven with complex internal connections, meanings, and implication. [Thus] it makes sense that divine speech should be represented as poetry." (Alter 1985, 141)

However, not everything in the prophets is poetry as only five of the prophetic books are completely written in poetic form, namely, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. (Greidanus 1988, 240)

One of the helpful clues for the reader is the observation that when the prophets are not themselves directly speaking God's words to the people, those sections will generally be written in prose. In other words, the prophetic speeches will typically be written in poetic form while the narrative or historical sections and the biographical and autobiographical accounts will be in prose.

Also, generally when God speaks to the prophet prose will be the preferred style of communication. (Greidanus 1988, 240; Ryken & Longman 1993, 305; Alter 1985, 138)

VI. Distinctive Elements Of Prophetic Genre

For this part of the discussion, the presenter should consult the Thesis-Project and draw on chapter 3, pages 116-124. The content found there will provide an outline and commentary for this section.

A. Claus Westermann Contribution – Accounts, Speeches And Prayers

The instructor can introduce this part of the lecture with the following quote from chapter 3, page 116 of the Thesis-Project.
"Claus Westermann, who has significantly influenced the study of prophetic genre, identified three major literary forms comprising prophetic speech. These literary forms include "accounts", "speeches" and "prayers". (Ryken & Longman 1993, 297; Greidanus 1988, 241)

"Accounts can be understood to be narratives that relate to the prophets while prayers are a record of words spoken by people directed to God. Speeches communicate the words of God or the messages from God spoken by the prophets to the people. These speeches or oracles are one of two kinds and they form the backbone of prophetic speech inasmuch as the prophets employ this form more than any other." (Ryken & Longman 1993, 300; von Rad 1966, 37 and Greidanus 1988, 241)

Speeches or oracles are either judgment speeches or salvation speeches.

1. Claus Westermann

- a. Is one who has significantly influenced the study of prophetic genre and he identified the three major literary forms which comprise prophetic speech as accounts, speeches and prayers.

2. Accounts

- a. Are narratives that relate to the prophets.

3. Prayers

- a. Provide a record of the words spoken by people directed to God.

4. Speeches

- a. Communicate the words of God or the messages from God spoken by the prophets to the people.
 - b. Exist as one of two kinds, namely, judgment speeches or salvation speeches and the prophets employ this form more than any other.

B. Prophetic Judgment Speeches

1. Typically Consist of Three Key Elements

- a. The Messenger Formula: "Thus says the Lord" or "The Lord spoke to me" (Amos 1:3; Isaiah 8)
 - b. A Statement Explaining the Reason For Yahweh's Action(s)

c. A Declaration of Yahweh's Action

Explain to the participants that all three elements of a judgment speech will not always be present and neither will they always appear in a particular order. The messenger formula reminds the people that the prophet speaks with divine authority and it is reflected in such phrases as "Thus says the LORD" or "The LORD spoke to me" - Amos 1:3; Isaiah 8. The employment of such formulaic expressions were a part of traditional communication in the Ancient Near East as Fee and Stuart confirm in the following statement as they write, "Such formulae as these were used by messengers in diplomatic and business settings in the ancient world to remind recipients that what they were saying was not something they were making up but was in fact the exact words of the one who had sent them to deliver the message (cf. Num 20:14; 1 Sam 11:9; 2 Sam 11:25)." (Fee and Stuart 2003, 197)

2. Judgment speeches can be directed against both individuals or nations including both foreign nations as well as God's covenant people.
3. The purpose of such announcements was to inform the subject(s) of the imminent wrath of God or to warn them of such judgment in order to induce repentance and avert the punishment. (Sandy & Giese 1995, 22)
4. Examples of Judgment Speeches

The instructor can project some of the following passages on power point or include the text in a handout to facilitate leading the participants in an observational exercise aimed at identifying the various component parts of a prophetic judgment speech.

The presenter can consult the notes in the Thesis-Project, chapter 2, pages 20-33 for exegetical comments on the Amos passages and chapter 3, pages 117-118 for further comments on judgment speeches.

Amos 1:3-5;
Amos 1:6-8;
Amos 1:9-10;
Amos 1:11-12;
Amos 1:13-15;
Amos 2:1-3;
Amos 2:4-5;
Amos 2:6-16;

Isaiah 14;
Hosea 4;
Ezekiel 6, 7, 30;
Jeremiah 44:1-6.

C. Prophetic Speeches Of Salvation

The presenter should consult the Thesis-Project notes in chapter 2, pages 69-74 and chapter 3, page 118.

Draw attention to the fact that the occurrences of salvation oracles are limited in Amos but there are two which occur at the very end of the book.

Three key elements also comprise salvation oracles. They include a Messenger formula, a statement of reassurance and a description of the future transformation of judgment into salvation and blessing. (Kaiser 2004, 110)

Just as with the judgment speeches so also with salvation speeches; all three elements will not always be included and their order of presentation can be varied.

1. Typically Consist of Three Key Elements

- a. The Messenger Formula - e.g. "Thus says the LORD"
- b. A Statement of Reassurance
- c. A Description of Future Transformation

2. Examples of Salvation Speeches

Salvation oracles in Amos are rare but two are found in Amos 9:11-15.

It is suggested that the presenter use an alternate salvation speech from Jeremiah 32:36-44 to illustrate how to identify the component elements and then work with the participants to examine the salvation speeches in Amos.

Other examples of salvation speeches are found in Isaiah 2:1-5; Hosea 2:14-23; Haggai 2:20-23.

The instructor can use power point to project the text of the passages or include the text in a handout in order to lead the participants in the observational exercise aimed at identifying the various component parts of these prophetic salvation speeches.

a. Jeremiah 32:42-44

The Messenger Formula 42a

42a "This is what the LORD says"

The Reassurance 42b

42b "As I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them."

The Future Transformation 43-44

43 "Once more fields will be bought in this land of which you say, 'It is a desolate waste, without men or animals, for it has been handed over to the Babylonians.' 44 Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, because I will restore their fortunes, declares the LORD."

b. Jeremiah 32:36-41

The Messenger Formula v36a

*36 "You are saying about this city, 'By the sword, famine and plague it will be handed over to the king of Babylon'; but **this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says**"*

The Reassurance cf. 32:27

*The reassurance takes us further back in the context of this passage to v27 where we read: "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. **Is anything too hard for Me?**"*

The Future Transformation v37-41

37 "I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. 38 They will be my people, and I will be their God. 39 I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. 40 I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. 41 I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul."

In reviewing the Amos passages, it would be effective to have the participants initially identify the component elements of the speeches working either individually or in small groups. After a short period of time, the presenter can then follow up with a group discussion to ensure that the concepts have been grasped.

c. Amos 9:11-12

The Messenger Formula

12d "declares the LORD"

Statement of Reassurance

11a "In that day"

Description of Future Transformation: 11b-12a

11b "I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, ¹² that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,"

d. Amos 9:13-15

The Messenger Formula

13b "declares the LORD"; 15b "says the LORD your God."

Statement of Reassurance

13a "Behold days are coming"

Description of Future Transformation

13c-15a "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,"

Additional passages that the participants can review for further practice could include Isaiah 2:1-5; Hosea 2:14-23; Haggai 2:20-23.

D. The Implications Of Prophetic Speeches For Preaching

1. Remember that prophetic speech is the dominant literary form of prophetic genre.

2. Determine at the outset if the unit of thought is a judgment or salvation oracle.
3. Determining the type of prophetic speech will impact the form one's sermon takes or the mood that is captured in the unit of thought.

VII. Additional Literary Forms Of Prophetic Genre

The presenter can consult and draw on chapter 3, pages 118-124 for lecture notes on the following additional literary forms presented here below.

Use the following statements from the Thesis-Project Chapter 3, page 119 in order to transition into this part of the session.

"While judgment and salvation oracles are the main genres by which the prophets communicated their message, within this genre grouping, the prophets utilized a number of additional forms. As Sandy and Giese write, "God did not leave his messengers with a cupboard bare of genres. They incorporated genres from many elements of daily life into their one major genre. The list is virtually endless, complete only when every single narrative about prophets in the Bible is analyzed as well as every single prophetic sermon." (Sandy & Giese 1995, 162) Since the majority of the prophets' messages were judgment in nature, in their creative genius, they used these diverse literary forms available to them in order to capture and keep the attention of the people. (Kaiser 2004, 101) However, the subject-matter was the primary determinative factor for the selection of the form employed." (Greidanus 1988, 244)

Some of the more frequently employed literary forms in judgment speeches by the prophets include the following forms:

A. Woe Oracles

The presenter can draw on the explanatory comments from the Thesis-Project, chapter 3, pages 119.

1. Purpose of Woe Oracles

Oracles of woe provide the prophet a means to communicate God's message of judgment with great intensity and these oracles should be heard as "expressions of prophetic outrage at the sinful behavior they condemn." (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 2004, 362)

2. Features of Woe Oracles

- a. Woe oracles are identifiable by the occurrence of the word "woe" or "alas" which occur at the beginning of the speech evoking a sense of dismay or alarm.
- b. The pronouncement of woe is followed by a general description of the offensive behavior or an unflattering depiction of the people along with an announcement of the specific judgment they will experience.
- c. Woe oracles generally do not include an introductory messenger formula.
- d. Woe oracles frequently appear in clusters in the prophetic books.

3. Examples of Woe Oracles

The presenter can choose whether or not to interact with all of the following examples depending on the available time in the session. However, it is recommended that the Amos passages be considered as a minimum since Amos is the case study for this project.

Amos 5:18-6:7
Habakkuk 2:6-19
Micah 2:1-5
Isaiah 5

B. Covenant Lawsuit

The presenter can draw on notes from the Thesis-Project, chapter 3, pages 119-120 for this part of the presentation.

1. General Description of A Covenant Lawsuit

Prophets frequently use the covenant lawsuit as they draw on the courtroom scene in which the LORD summons His people and puts them on trial in court. Yahweh frequently is featured in the covenant lawsuit both as the prosecutor presenting the case against His people as well as the Judge who renders the final verdict. (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 2004, 367; von Rad 1966, 303; Fee and Stuart 2003, 194)

2. Elements of A Covenant Lawsuit

There are several elements which comprise the covenant lawsuit. There is the "Opening Appeal and Call for the People to Listen" which often includes a summons in which the hills, mountains, heavens or the earth are called as witnesses. The "Question of Motive(s)" frequently has the LORD inquiring where He has gone wrong in view of the many great things He has done for His people as He challenges His people to account for themselves. "Charges" are then brought against God's people which generally include a summary description of God's faithfulness in contrast to the covenant violations of His people. Finally, a "Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment" is given. Micah 6, Hosea 4 and Jeremiah 2 are examples of a covenant lawsuit.

- a. The Opening Appeal
The "Opening Appeal and Call for the People to Listen" often includes a summons in which the hills, mountains, heavens or the earth are called as witnesses.
- b. The Questioning of Motives and Actions
The Lord frequently inquires of the people where He has gone wrong in the treatment of them. In view of the many great things He has done for His people one would expect a response of obedience and faithfulness. The people must therefore account for their wayward behavior.
- c. The Charges
God brings charges against His people which generally includes a summary description of God's faithfulness in contrast to the covenant violations of His people.
- d. Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment
The lawsuit concludes with a pronouncement of guilty and a sentence of judgment.

Not every lawsuit will contain each of these elements explicitly nor will they occur in this precise order.

3. Examples of Covenant Lawsuits

The presenter can use power point to project the text of the following passages or include the text in a handout in order to lead the participants in the process of identifying the various elements of the covenant lawsuit.

- a. Micah 6
 - The Opening Appeal 6:1-2
 - The Questioning of Motives and Actions 6:3
 - The Charges 6:4-12
 - Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment 6:13-16
- b. Jeremiah 2:4-37
 - The Opening Appeal 2:4
 - The Questioning of Motives and Actions 5-9
 - The LORD's charge 10-35a
 - Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment 35b-37
- c. Hosea 4
 - The Opening Appeal 4:1a
 - The LORD's Charge 4:1b-2
 - Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment 4:3-19

C. Disputation

The presenter can draw on chapter 3, pages 120-121 of the Thesis-Project for an explanation of a disputation.

The instructor can transition into a discussion on "Disputation" by stating that a disputation shares a common goal with the covenant lawsuit namely to "leave the opponent devoid of further argumentation and resigned to the divine decision." (Ryken & Longman 1993, 303)

Disputations frequently employ rhetorical questions as a means of drawing in the listening audience. The prophet Malachi effectively uses disputations employing typical rhetorical questions in order to communicate his message for the people. Also, the book of Habakkuk can be considered as a lengthy disputation as Habakkuk's complaint against God receives a response that results in the prophet's expression of worship and submission.

Disputation is also found in the prophecy of Amos as seen in Amos 3:3-8.

1. The Purpose of a Disputation

The goal of a disputation is the same as that of the covenant lawsuit, namely, to "leave the opponent devoid of further argumentation and resigned to the divine decision." (Ryken & Longman 1993, 303)
2. Disputations and Rhetorical Questions

Disputations often use rhetorical questions as a means of engaging the audience.

e.g. Malachi effectively uses disputations using rhetorical questions in order to communicate his message for the people.

3. Typically Consist of Three Key Elements

- a. A Declaration
- b. A Discussion
- c. A Refutation

4. Examples of Disputations

- a. Malachi 1:2-5
A Declaration 1:2a
A Discussion 1:2b-4
A Refutation 1:5
- b. Malachi 1:6-14
A Declaration 1:6
A Discussion 1:7-13
A Refutation 1:14
- c. Habakkuk

The book of Habakkuk can be considered as a lengthy disputation as Habakkuk's complaint against God receives a response that results in the prophet's expression of worship and submission. Observe the prophet's questions in Habakkuk 1:2-4; 1:13-2:1; and then God's replies (1:5-11; 2:2-5, 6-20) which ultimately results in the prophet's response of worship 3:1-19).

- d. Amos 3:3-8

Disputation is also found in the prophecy of Amos in Amos 3:3-8.

- A Declaration 3:7
- A Discussion 3:3-6
- A Refutation 3:8

D. Funeral Lament Or Dirge

The Presenter can draw on chapter 3, page 121 of the Thesis-Project for a description of a funeral lament or dirge and Old Testament examples.

1. The Purpose or Function of a Dirge Was to Shock the Audience.

A funeral lament or dirge effectively employed by the prophet had a jolting effect on his audience. Greidanus states, "This form was well-suited for shocking carefree Israel into an awareness of their precarious position before God and in the world." (Greidanus 1988, 244)

2. Key Elements of a Dirge

Key elements of the prophetic dirge include a call to hear, the dirge, a messenger formula and then a prediction. Remind the participants that each of these elements will not always be present in a dirge.

- a. Call to Hear
- b. The Dirge
- c. The Messenger Formula
- d. The Prediction

3. Examples of a Dirge or Funeral Lament

The presenter can choose whether to hand out hard copies of the biblical text to the participants or project them by power point in order to facilitate discussion and guide the students through the process of identifying the key elements of a dirge.

- a. Amos 5:1-3

Commentary notes for this passage are found in the Thesis-Project, chapter 2, pages 42-43.

The presenter can introduce this lament by stating that Amos 5:1-3 is a powerful illustration of an effective dirge that would have surprised the nation of Israel who believed their current experience evidenced God's pleasure with them. For the wealthy and upper middle-class they thought the empire was healthy and stable. Amos' prophecy in the form of a funeral lament conveys that things were not as optimal as the people thought. Amos is in a mode of grieving as if the nation had died. This symbolism would have shocked the people.

Observe the following elements in the dirge:

Call to Hear 5:1

The Dirge 5:2

The Messenger Formula 5:3a

The Prediction 5:3b

Call to Hear

The Dirge

The Messenger Formula

The Prediction

b. Jeremiah 9:17-22

Call to Hear - 9:17b-18, 20

The Dirge - 9:19, 21

The Messenger Formula - 9:17a

The Prediction - 9:22

Call to Hear

The Dirge

The Messenger Formula

The Prediction

c. Isaiah 14:4-23

This passage will illustrate that not every element typical of a dirge will necessarily be present in the text.

Call to Hear: n/a

The Dirge: 4-14

The Messenger Formula: 22b,23b

The Prediction: 15-22a, 23a

E. Oracles Against Foreign Nations

The presenter can draw on the Thesis-Project chapter 3, pages 121-122 for a description of this oracle.

Oracles against foreign nations is a literary form frequently employed by the prophets.

1. Are Frequently Used By The Prophets.

In the Major Prophets alone, over 25 chapters and 680 verses (a bulk of material that exceeds all the chapters and verses in all of the apostle Paul's prison epistles!) are given over to this one literary form (Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32). One could also add Amos 1-2 and the entire Books of Nahum and Obadiah." (Kaiser 2004, 111) These types of oracles announce a message of judgment against nations and they serve not only to demonstrate that God will hold nations accountable for their actions but to assure God's covenant people of His protection. While the persons addressed are foreigners these oracles were probably delivered in an Israelite context and for the benefit of God's people. As a result, "This means that overt announcements of judgment may function as indirect announcements of salvation for Israel." (Sandy & Giese 1995, 164)

The Abrahamic covenant where God promises to bless those who bless God's people and curse those who curse them forms the theological basis for the oracles of judgment against the nations.

2. A Two-fold Function of Oracles Against Foreign Nations

- a. God is sovereign over all peoples and holds the nations accountable.
- b. It reminds God's people that He will protect His people.

3. Examples of Oracles Against Foreign Nations

Amos 1-2;
Jeremiah 46-51
Obadiah
Ezekiel 25-32
Nahum

F. Prophetic Narratives

The presenter can draw on Thesis-Project, chapter 3, pages 122 for an explanation of Prophetic Narratives.

The Presenter can introduce this subject with the following statement. The prophetic narratives found in the prophetic books are of two different kinds namely Vocation Reports and Symbolic Actions.

1. Vocation Reports

Are also referred to as "call narratives" and they provide for us the story of the prophet's call and commission.

a. Purpose of Vocation Reports

Affirm the legitimacy of the prophet's call and their authority to speak for God.

b. Examples of Vocation Reports

Examples of such call narratives are found in Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 1-3 and Amos 7:14-15.

The presenter can highlight any of these particular examples but in regards to the example of Amos, consult the Thesis-Project, chapter 2, pages 60-61.

Isaiah 6
Jeremiah 1
Ezekiel 1-3
Amos 7:14-15

2. Symbolic Actions

The second type of prophetic narrative relates to symbolic actions that the prophet was to enact and includes specific instructions associated with such actions. (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 2004, 370)

Refers to those symbolic actions that the prophets enact as part of their prophetic message.

a. Purpose of Symbolic Actions

Typically, these narratives serve to illustrate and reinforce the theme of the prophet's message found throughout the book. (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 2004, 370; Ryken & Longman 1993, 304)

They are also attention getting which contribute to them being effective means of communication.

They are attention getting and they illustrate and reinforce the prophet's message.

b. Examples of Symbolic Actions

Examples of symbolic actions include Jeremiah's instruction to bury and then dig up again the linen belt in Perath and Hosea's instruction to marry Gomer the prostitute as well as Ezekiel's activities.

This type of prophetic narrative is found frequently in the prophetic books.

Jeremiah 13: Jeremiah and the linen belt

Hosea 1-3: Hosea's marriage to Gomer- Hosea 1:2-9

Ezekiel 4-5: Ezekiel's various enactments

G. Vision Reports

The presenter can consult the Thesis-Project, chapter 3, page 123 for this part of the session.

1. A Description of Vision Reports

- a. Vision reports consist of things the prophet saw or heard that communicated or illustrated God's message.
- b. Vision reports can be identified by such terms or phrases as "see", "made to see" or "and behold" which is generally followed by a recounting of the vision.

2. The Nature and Purpose of Prophetic Vision Reports

- a. Sometimes vision reports utilize normal everyday objects, like the figs in Jeremiah 28 or the plumb line in Amos 7 which the prophet uses as a means to illustrate his prophetic message from the LORD and give his word from the Lord.
- b. Sometimes vision reports are very unusual in appearance as illustrated in apocalyptic literature where unusual creatures and images are depicted having eschatological implications wherein a special angelic messenger reveals God's intent and revelation to the prophet, who subsequently communicates the revelation he has just received.

Conclusion:

Identifying the key elements of prophetic genre and the literary form(s) found within the literary unit of study is a foundational part of the preacher's preparation. It is key in order for the preacher to grasp the meaning of the text and it will also impact the form of the sermon the preacher will preach. For example, a sermon dealing with a series of woes will capture a different mood or tone than a positive restoration salvation oracle.

SUPPLEMENT 4.1 - CLASS HANDOUT (PRESENTER'S COPY)

Session 4: EXEGETICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PREACHING THE PROPHETS

Transition to Session 4

The presenter can introduce Session Four by saying something like the following: "In our fourth session we will be considering some of the foundational considerations that need to be a part of the exegetical and hermeneutical process in order to gain a proper understanding of the prophetic books. Also, special attention will be devoted to highlighting some of the key opportunities that the prophetic books present for effectively applying the prophetic text to today's audience.

This session will conclude with a sample sermon outline and manuscript from the book of Amos. As well, a summary of some key steps involved in compiling an expositional sermon from the prophetic books will be included.

Goals:

At the end of this session each participant should:

1. Understand the importance of establishing the context of the Minor prophetic books by being able to identify at least three main considerations that help place the prophetic books within the broader Old Testament context.
2. Be able to list four important steps to take in order to set the prophetic passage in its proper context.
3. Explain the relevancy of preaching the Minor Prophets today by being able to identify at least three subject categories from which application can be made to today's audience.

Introduction

Biblical students and preachers alike acknowledge that reading with understanding and preaching the Old Testament prophets has its challenges. However, wrestling through the challenges is a worthy initiative which yields rewarding dividends. Ryken and Longman remind us of both the challenge and reward:

Even a trained scholar like Douglas Stuart can lament that "the prophetic books are among the most difficult parts of the bible to interpret or read with understanding" (Fee and Stuart 149). In the page of prophecy one meets many strange names. Some play major roles on the stage of earth's history (e.g., Hezekiah, Gedaliah). Long-departed people (e.g., Assyrians, Philistines) and ancient cities (e.g. Nineveh, Thebes) dot the prophetic landscape. While all of this is no more of a problem for prophecy than for other types of biblical literature (e.g. historical narratives, poetry), the very fact that the prophets deal with real people and the

problems of the ancient world assures readers that their quest will be a rewarding one. Prophecy is designed to be relevant to everyday life. Moreover, the principles resident in the prophetic record are those that are applicable to the needs of every reader. In cases where a prophecy stands fulfilled (e.g. Isa. 37:33-37; Hos. 1:4), the reader is further assured that God is in control of all of earth's history, including the life of each individual person. (Ryken & Longman 1993, 299)

Convinced of the relevancy of the prophets for today's audience, the preacher needs to be aware of some of the key exegetical and hermeneutical considerations that will help the preacher unearth the prophetic message. Following is a review of some of these important elements that will assist today's preacher in the preparation of effective expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets.

I. Key Exegetical Considerations In Preaching The Minor Prophets

A. Examine The Historical, Cultural And Political Context Of The Prophetic Book And The Preaching Passage In Particular.

Establishing the historical, cultural and political context of the prophetic book is essential as the beginning step for determining what the text meant to the original audience. Ascertaining what the passage meant to the original audience must first be established before one is able to make the connection of what the passage means for a current twenty-first century audience.

Bible dictionaries are a helpful resource in garnering an understanding of the historical context. Fee and Stuart suggest reading a Bible dictionary article on a prophetic book before beginning a study of that book. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 189)

Commentaries are useful tools in gaining an understanding of the historical context by means of their introductions. They also are important for gaining a fuller understanding of individual verses by means of the commentary they provide.

While Bible handbooks, in contrast to Bible dictionaries and commentaries are not as thorough in their introductions or as extensive in their commentary on individual verses, they serve a useful role in gaining an overview understanding of larger "chunks" of prophetic books in a briefer amount of time. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 189)

B. Set The Minor Prophetic Book Within The Context Of The Old Testament.

While acknowledging the Old Testament can be an intimidating part of the Scriptures it is helpful to remember that just a few key concepts and events can establish the broad context of the older testament.

1. The Timeline of the Prophetic Books

The prophetic books were written during a relatively brief period of Israel's history. A typical conservative dating approach of the prophetic books renders that these books were written during a period of time of approximately three hundred years, 760 B.C. to 460 B.C. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 190) Recognizing this kind of timeline makes the task of discovering how the books relate to each other and the overall canon more manageable.

2. One Old Testament People, Two Kingdoms

It is foundational to remember that following the united kingdom under Israel's first three kings, Saul, David and Solomon, the kingdom divided resulting in the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. While the prophets will sometimes address both kingdoms, generally one particular kingdom is predominantly in focus.

3. The Captivities

The threat of exile as the ultimate covenant curse is frequently employed by the prophets and forms an important backdrop to some of the Minor prophetic books. It is key to remember that the northern kingdom of Israel experienced captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah experienced captivity at the hands of the Babylonians in three stages beginning in 605 B.C. and climaxing with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The return from the Babylonian captivity began in 538 B.C. and forms the background of the post-exilic prophetic books, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi as they document the reestablishing of the people back to their land. This historical period is described in Ezra and Nehemiah.

These considerations are some of the main "hooks" upon which much of the prophetic material hangs as the prophets declare their messages of warning, hope and comfort to God's people.

C. Set The Passage Within The Context Of The Prophetic Book.

Having established the context of the book within the Old Testament it is important to gain an understanding of how the parts of the book fit together.

1. Capture the Big Picture.

One of the key ways of observing how a book fits together is to identify the theme and key purpose of the book. Ascertain the big picture of the book and then assess how the various component parts fit together with that overarching purpose. This part of your study will also assist the preacher when it comes to preaching a particular portion of the book and ensuring that one is preaching a literary unit.

The outline of the book of Amos used in this project illustrates how an understanding of the overall theme or purpose of the book can be established

by observing the key components or elements of the book. One of the helpful ways of establishing the outline of the book of Amos is to observe key phrases or terms and in particular the repetition of such phrases and words.

*The Presenter can provide a copy of the Amos outline to the participants for illustration purposes (Appendix B).
For a fuller discussion and explanation of the rationale for the breakdown of Amos (see chapter 2, pages 11-12).*

D. Remember The Importance Of Working With A Literary Unit.

It is imperative when preaching any sermon that the preacher ensures that they are dealing with a literary unit. Some helpful ways of discovering a literary unit can include the following:

1. Observe any repetition of key phrases or words.
2. Does the writer change the subject or discussion?
3. Is there a shift in pronouns?
4. Observe any occurrence of inclusio sometimes identifiable by means of "opening and closing formulae, refrains and use of bookending words/ideas." (Ryken & Longman 1993, 300)
5. Be aware of the genre and literary form which will help prepare you for what to look for.
6. Most translations use paragraph designations.

II. Key Hermeneutical Considerations In Preaching The Minor Prophets

A. Remember General Characteristics Of The Prophetic Writings.

These general characteristics of the prophetic writings will have been reviewed in Session 3 but it is important to mention them again in Session 4 because of their hermeneutical implications.

1. Prose vs. Poetry, Forth-telling vs. Foretelling and Theocentric Focus

Sensitivity to whether the text is prose or poetry, forth-telling versus foretelling as well as the overall Theo-centric focus of the prophetic books are some of the important distinctions to remember.

a. Prose and Poetry

Identify if your literary unit consists of prose or poetry or both. Prophetic speech that consists of the prophet addressing the people with a message from God will generally be written in the genre of poetry. Narrative or historical sections and biographical and autobiographical accounts will be in prose.

Poetry must be understood and interpreted in accordance with proper hermeneutical considerations. For example, consideration needs to be given to rhythm and the stylistic features characteristic of the varied kinds of parallelism and the importance of concrete imagery.

Poetry was a desired and chosen method whereby the prophets communicated God's message because it was more memorable. Culturally, the people were accustomed to important events being preserved by means of poetry. This was particularly important for a culture that was largely non-literate and where individual ownership of written documents was rare. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 197-198)

b. Forth-telling vs. Foretelling

Remember that most of the ministry of the prophet is forth-telling as the prophet is addressing his contemporary audience concerning the current circumstances facing the people and the nation.

Consider Amos 1-2 where most of the judgment oracles were for the immediate or near future. In Ezekiel 25-29 and Jeremiah 46-41 the judgment oracles mostly against foreign nations were largely fulfilled within a few decades.

Examine your text where predictive prophecy occurs and determine if it has near fulfillment or a long-distance fulfillment. Determine if it has been fulfilled already in the past or is it prophecy that awaits an eschatological fulfillment?

Consider Amos 9:11-15.

c. Theocentric Focus

Since the prophetic books have a Theo-centric focus it is always important to observe the instruction that the selected preaching passage holds regarding the nature of God and His activity in the lives of His people and/or the peoples of the world.

2. The Importance of the Covenants

An understanding of the various covenants is crucial to understanding the messages of the prophets. It is important to read the prophetic books through

the lens of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, as well as the Davidic and New Covenants.

3. Conditional or Unconditional Prophecies

In studying and understanding the prophetic text the student needs to discern whether prophecies are conditional or unconditional.

a. Unconditional Prophecies

Unconditional prophecies are those promises or prophecies that God has committed to fulfilling unilaterally and are not dependent upon human response. Some of these prophecies are related to promises that are part of the Abrahamic, Davidic or New Covenants. By contrast, with conditional prophecies God's response is conditioned on the obedience or disobedience by the nation or individuals. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30 are clear examples of promises of blessings or warnings of judgment conditioned by responses of obedience or disobedience.

b. Conditional Prophecies

Regarding conditional prophecies it is imperative for the interpreter of Scripture to remember that the conditional elements of prophecies can be implied as well as stated explicitly. For example, the statement of Jeremiah in 18:7-10 provides an insight that applies not only to his prophecy but to prophetic speech in general. He writes,

"If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it."

On the other hand, the prophecy of Jonah serves as an example of conditional prophecy that is implied. Jonah was reluctant to take God's message of judgment to Nineveh because he believed that they would repent and if they repented, he knew that God would relent and be merciful to them. However, it is significant to observe there is nothing of any conditional element that can be found within Jonah's prophecy (Jonah 4:1-2).

B. Remember The Key Elements Of Prophetic Genre And The Literary Forms.

The presenter will only need to briefly review these matters concerning genre and literary forms as they will have been discussed in session 3 in greater detail. For additional comments review chapter 3, pages 116-124 and seminar session #3.

When seeking to determine and understand the message of the prophet, it is essential to remember the key elements of prophetic genre as part of the hermeneutical process.

1. Think Oracles/Speeches.

When studying prophetic books and isolating individual sections it is helpful to think "oracles" in a similar way that one thinks paragraphs when studying the epistles. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 193)

Begin by determining if the section is a judgment oracle or a salvation speech.

2. Identify Literary Forms.

If the oracle is a judgment speech it is important to identify what type of literary form is employed by the prophet and the characteristic elements of that form.

3. Genre and Form Impact the Preacher's Sermon.

Identifying the particular kind of oracle and literary forms the prophet employs is key for the preacher for at least two reasons.

- a. It helps alert and prepare the preacher for how to listen to or understand the text.
- b. Knowing the genre and literary form will impact how the preacher constructs and delivers his sermon. For example, preaching a sermon from a woe oracle will have a different mood and tone than preaching a salvation oracle.

Transition:

Having determined the meaning of the prophet's message by means of the exegetical and hermeneutical process the preacher is now ready to craft his sermon in a way that will connect with a twenty-first century audience.

III. Important Considerations For Applying The Message Of The Prophets To A Twenty-first Century Audience

One of the key challenges for today's preacher when preaching sermons from the Minor Prophets relates to how one applies what the prophet said to his audience and make it relevant to a twenty-first century audience. This is particularly challenging when some matters the prophet addressed are no longer relevant or even exist today. For example, a key warning issued to their people by the Old Testament prophets was the threat of national exile; such a fear no longer exists for the believer today.

In this kind of circumstance, how does the text apply to a modern listener? The following discussion will highlight significant opportunities found within prophetic literature that relate and apply to today's audience.

Some of the commentary from Duvall and Hays in Grasping God's Word regarding how the Old Testament applies to today's audience has been incorporated into this section.

A. Social Justice/Injustice

Social justice is a subject the prophets address numerous times including many occurrences in the book of Amos. Social justice matters are treated alongside the subject of idolatry and are regarded as equally serious offences. (Duvall & Hays 2005, 378) From God's perspective, matters of social justice remain important today even though the church has not always regarded these matters to be as important as they are.

However, in today's culture in North America, millennials and postmoderns are characterized by a concern for social justice matters. Social justice initiatives however need to be rooted and anchored to biblical and theological convictions. The prophets scream with a concern for social justice and powerfully articulate that these concerns reflect the heart of God. This major emphasis found within the prophetic books gives today's preacher the opportunity to demonstrate the relevancy and applicability of the prophet's message to a twenty-first century audience.

In Amos, examples of social injustice included unfairness in the judicial courts due to bribery, unfair and corrupt business practices by business leaders who took advantage of the vulnerable, as well as the general practice of the powerful taking advantage of the powerless including inflicting inhumane treatment upon them. The prophets make clear that God has a heart for justice and is repulsed and offended when the influential trample on the rights of the vulnerable and needy. The preacher can authoritatively preach the important theological principle from the prophetic text that God is concerned for the poor and the vulnerable. From this principle the preacher can powerfully communicate that "followers of Jesus need to be moved by the things that move the heart of God" and therefore must themselves be concerned about social justice matters.

The important challenge in applying this truth is to identify today's social justice issues. Duvall and Hays lament that for many in North America today concern for social justice issues are defined more by political affiliation than the teaching of Scripture. They write, "The biblical interpretive challenge for us is not to have Republican views or Democrat views, but rather Christian views – views

anchored in biblical theology rather than in secular culture." (Duvall & Hays 2005, 379)

We need to identify who the vulnerable are today in our culture and society. Who are those in our neighborhood who do not have a voice or the means to defend themselves? Some who fit within this description might include the poor, the elderly, the unborn, single mothers, the abused, illegal immigrants, widows or widowers among others.

From the prophetic books it is clear that God held His covenant people responsible for caring for the disenfranchised. Followers of Christ today will sense the urgency of the issue of social justice as we realize that God still holds His people responsible for protecting and caring for the vulnerable. This message permeates the prophetic writings and will resonate with a twenty-first century audience.

B. Ritualistic Hypocritical Worship And The Value Of Being Authentic

Addressing Israel's struggle with ritualistic and hypocritical worship is another point of application which allows today's preacher to demonstrate the relevancy of the prophetic text for today's audience. While it was God who instituted the idea of sacrifice and ritual the prophets regularly condemn ritualistic worship. As demonstrated in Amos, God is repulsed when ritualism and routine in worship replaces a heart of devotion. Israel was guilty of engaging in routine without allowing their worship to impact their behavior and ethics. Their worship did not flow from their relationship; their worship did not flow out of a heart of devotion. While ritual can assist the believer in the development of their relationship with God it is not a substitute for it. (Duvall & Hays 2005, 380)

From an application standpoint, as believers today we are aware of the tension between these two elements in our own experience. For example, do we read our Bible because of our love for God or out of a legalistic sense of duty? Have we ever suffered from the superstition that if we miss our devotions during a busy morning that we will end up having a very bad day?

Postmodern people value that which is authentic. They place a premium on that which is genuine. Israel was guilty of hypocrisy which angered God. Therefore, postmoderns will understand a sense of God's displeasure when the preacher addresses the disconnect that often exists in the lives of God's people between what we know and how we live and the imperative to address this hypocrisy. The need for authentic, genuine worship is a theme woven throughout the prophetic books. As such these books provide the preacher with the opportunity to address a twenty-first century audience on the need to be authentic and genuine; a subject they are already keenly sensitive to.

C. Covenant Unfaithfulness: The Analogy Of Marriage And Wounding The Heart Of God

There are significant differences between the prophet's original audience and that of the preacher today. As followers of Christ, we are not under the Old covenant and its covenant curses. We are not part of a theocracy despite how God-fearing one's country used to be. And we are not under the threat of invasion by enemy nations who intend to exile us. In what sense then do the prophet's messages containing these elements have relevancy for people today?

A regular feature of the prophet's message is that people have sinned and judgment awaits unless they repent. It is important to realize today that for the unbeliever sin against God ultimately results in severe consequence of eternal judgment unless they repent. For the believer who sins today, it is a serious offense against God but it is an offense that is covered by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though our sin is atoned for by the sacrifice of Christ whereby we receive forgiveness, this is not to result in a flippant attitude toward sin by the believer (Romans 6:1-2).

While the believer today is not under the Old Testament covenant with the impending threat of exile, there still remains a powerful application for believers from these messages of warning issued by the prophets. Duvall and Hays provide a helpful insight when they encourage the reader (and preacher) today to focus on the relational collateral damage that our sin causes. A favorite analogy employed by the prophets to depict Israel and Judah's covenant unfaithfulness is the unfaithful spouse. Israel and Judah as the bride married to Yahweh have been unfaithful.

This analogy effectively conveys the emotional hurt experienced by Yahweh when He is betrayed by His bride. If we view our sin against God in the same manner as we view breaking the law of the land, this important emotional consequence is not captured. If we are guilty of a driving infraction and are caught, we pay a fine but there is little if any emotional consequence to our action. This is not so however in our relationship with our Lord. While there is no threat of exile or foreign invasion for us, and while our sin is forgiven by the blood of Christ, our sinful actions still hurt and offend God and damage our relationship. Intimacy in our relationship with Him will be lost until confession and repentance occurs.

As a result, for the preacher today when dealing with the judgment passages, even though significant particulars do not apply to a twenty-first century audience, the principle that our sinful actions cause emotional pain and injury to our God preventing intimacy in our relationship with Him remains the same. (Duvall and Hays 2005, 378)

D. Idolatry

The presenter can consult the Thesis-Project chapter 2, pages 9-10 and chapter 3, pages 91-93 for additional comments on idolatry and the people of God. A significant discussion on the problem of idolatry will have already been reviewed in the session addressing the Spiritual Issues Confronting the prophet Amos.

The prophets consistently confront God's people over the sin of idolatry. The particular idolatry confronting the people in the days of Amos related to the worship of Baal. The sin of idolatry also characterizes God's people today and this reality provides an opportunity for the preacher to demonstrate the relevance and applicability of the prophetic text to today's audience. While our struggle today is not the worship of Baal our idols are many. They can include one's personal relationships, reputation, vocational aspirations, recreational pursuits, money, materialism as well as a host of other things. Today's North American audience knows that we are sometimes tempted to allow these kinds of things to crowd out our love for God.

E. The Challenge Of Authority

The prophetic books celebrate that God is sovereign over all nations and peoples; not just over His covenant people but over all of humanity. God's sovereignty is one of the great themes of Scripture. Those who align themselves with God's sovereignty go with God and those who resist His sovereignty ultimately lose (cf. Amos 7 - Amaziah). This emphasis provides a valid preaching and connecting point for today's preacher in addressing people in our postmodern North American culture. Today's culture in general is anti-establishment and anti-authority. The challenge which this reality presents can be legitimately and effectively addressed from the Minor Prophets.

F. The Consummation Of God's Program And The Reality Of Hope

Postmoderns have by and large lost hope in human institutions and no longer embrace the reality that things are going to get better and better. While modernism advanced many wonderful discoveries and innovations making life easier and more comfortable, no longer is it believed that science can provide all of the answers to solve life's dilemmas. Most recognize that the challenges which face us as a society, both locally and globally, are beyond the reach of our best leaders and politicians to resolve.

However, the prophetic books celebrate that God is up to something. He knows what He is doing and where His program is headed. In Him hope is found through the arrival of the Messiah and the ultimate delivery of the kingdom made possible through the work of salvation accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. This great prophetic theme of hope resonates with humanity's greatest longings

and is a message that today's preacher can champion to those in a pessimistic postmodern culture.

Conclusion:

Studying the prophetic biblical text can be challenging for the preacher. However, this session has demonstrated that when the message of the biblical writer is correctly understood within its context, it yields a number of important concepts and themes that can be readily applied to today's twenty-first century audience.

AN ILLUSTRATION

MOVING FROM PROPHETIC TEXT TO SERMON FOR A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AUDIENCE USING AMOS 5:18-6:14

Following is an illustration of how to move from the prophetic text to crafting a sermon for a twenty-first century audience using the literary unit of Amos 5:18-6:14.

Four major components comprise this section. An exegetical outline and idea is included followed by a homiletical outline and idea. A manuscript of a sermon from this passage is then provided. Finally, a summary of some important steps to consider when preaching from a prophetic passage is provided with commentary on how these steps were included in the preparation for this sample sermon.²

² The catalyst for preaching this sermon was an invitation from a church to participate in a special summer series on the Minor Prophets. My assignment was to give a single message of approximately fifty minutes from the book of Amos that would provide the congregation with a summary of the key issues of the book. The current passage was selected inasmuch as it addresses the three dominant issues in the book of Amos, namely, ritualistic worship, materialistic greed and social injustice. However, if one were conducting a preaching series through the entire book of Amos or preaching a single sermon with time constraints of a thirty-minute message, then the author would recommend dealing with each woe oracle separately. The same exegetical and preaching outline could be adapted to either oracle.

Exegetical Outline and Idea of Amos 5:18-6:14

I. Amos announced God's judgment of exile upon Israel for their hypocritical worship and social injustice. 5:18-27

- A. Amos announced Israel's inescapable judgment in the Day of the Lord. 5:18-21
- B. Amos announced God's rejection of Israel's worship. 5:22-23
- C. God desired that Israel's worship would flow from a heart of devotion marked by a commitment to social justice. 5:24-25
- D. Amos announced that Israel's hypocritical worship would result in God's judgment of exile. 5:26-27

II. Amos announced God's judgment upon Israel's wealthy elite because their materialistic greed had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and false sense of security. 6:1-3

- A. Amos pronounced a woe judgment upon Israel's wealthy elite 6:1a
- B. The materialistic greed of Israel's wealthy elite had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and false sense of security. 6:1b-3

III. Amos announced judgment against Israel climaxing with exile because the wealthy elite valued their extravagant lifestyle and military accomplishments more than faithful covenant living. 6:4-14

- A. Amos condemned Israel's pursuit of an extravagant lifestyle while having no concern for the well-being of the nation. 6:4-6
- B. Amos announced God's judgment of exile against Israel because of their social injustice and pride. 6:7-14
 - 1. Amos announced that God's judgment would be tailor made, certain and thorough. 6:7-11
 - 2. Amos announced that Israel was guilty of social injustice. 6:12
 - 3. Amos exposed Israel's pride over their military accomplishments. 6:13
 - 4. Amos announced God's judgment of exile against Israel. 6:14

Exegetical Idea:

Israel's covenant unfaithfulness manifested in social injustice, hypocritical worship and materialistic greed resulted in God's promised judgment of exile.

Homiletical Outline and Idea of Amos 5:18-6:14

I. The health of my relationship with God is not measured by the externals. 5:18-20; 6:1-3, 13

- A. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals I can be deceived. 5:18-20; 6:1-3, 13
 - 1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance I can be deceived. 5:18-20
 - a. Israel longed for the Day of the Lord when they should have feared the Day of the Lord. 5:18-20
 - 2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances I can be deceived. 6:1-3, 13
 - a. Israel's wealth had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and self-sufficiency. 6:1-3, 13
- B. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27; 6:4-11, 14
 - 1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27
 - a. God's displeasure is seen in His words of rejection. 5:21-23
 - b. God's displeasure is seen in His promise of the judgment of exile. 5:26-27
 - 2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances God is not pleased. 6:4-11, 14
 - a. God's displeasure is seen in His words of condemnation. 6:4-6
 - b. God's displeasure is seen in His promise of the judgment of exile. 6:7-11, 14

II. The health of my relationship with God is measured by my heart of devotion. 5:24-25; 6:12

- A. We need to have a heart of devotion that is concerned with the things that concern the heart of God. 5:24-25; 6:12

Homiletical Idea: The health of my relationship with God isn't measured by the externals but by my heart of devotion.

Sermon Manuscript of Amos 5:18-6:14

"What Seems So Right Can Be So Wrong"

Introduction

"How is it that what seems so right can be so wrong?"

You know it's not a very comfortable feeling when you are convinced that you are right but you are being told that you are wrong. Have you ever experienced that? Perhaps you've been there? Maybe we've all been there.

Several years ago, I was surprised to get a voice mail message from the Registrar General's office in Thunder Bay (Ontario). I had been preparing for a wedding and I reached into my filing cabinet and pulled out my file containing the marriage documents you have to fill out to make everything legal. As I reached into my file I pulled out my last form. This wasn't a problem but it just meant that I needed to order more forms so I would have one on hand for the next wedding that I would officiate. So, I sent off my order to Thunder Bay to the Registrar General. A few days later I received their voice mail message indicating that they were not able to process my order; not because they didn't have any more documents but because I wasn't authorized to perform marriages.

You can appreciate that I was anxious to quickly return their call and clear up the misunderstanding. However, I wasn't very far into the conversation when it became clear that from their perspective, there was no misunderstanding. I really was not authorized to perform marriages.

In my response, I pushed back and said, "I'm a little confused. I'm sitting here at my desk and I'm looking at my registration license with the number that your office issued me several years ago. I have been using that registration number for these last several years. How can that be?" Their short reply was, "I'm sorry sir you are not authorized to perform marriages." So, I attempted to push back a little harder. I said, "You know on those marriage documents there's that section on the very back of the forms, that type-A personalities like myself have the option of filling in. And when we fill that section in your office will mail back that self-addressed postcard sized piece of paper confirming that your office received the completed paperwork and that everything has been finalized. I said, "I have a stack of those returned cards that I am looking at." "I'm sorry sir, you are not authorized to perform marriages. You will need to fill out a new application and when you complete that application, we will give you your new registration authorizing you to conduct marriages. And just to make everything easy, we will give you that same number that you have been using all along!"

So, over the next couple of weeks I worked at filling out the application, getting the required documents from the church leaders that I needed as part of the process. And as I was working at assembling the various documents I thought I'd make one last call to the Registrar General's office. Perhaps, I could get talking to someone else and get this problem resolved. So, I called again but it was a very short conversation as they assured me that I really did need to submit the application.

However, it was just a few short minutes later that the telephone rang. It was the Registrar General's office confirming that there was no need to worry; that everything was now OK. I no longer needed to submit my application. They explained that during our last conversation a former employee, who was now retired, had dropped into the office to see some of his former co-workers, and he just happened to overhear the one end of the conversation. And when the individual to whom I had been speaking hung up the phone, he asked, "What was that conversation all about?" thinking that he already knew. When he was fully briefed on the issue, he said, "Have you checked downstairs in the basement?" Prior to this individual retiring, the office had run out of storage space so they packed up several of these files putting them in boxes and placed them in special storage in the basement of their building. And sure enough, they went downstairs and found my file containing all of my necessary credentials authorizing me to perform marriages.

I was happy to see that whole exercise come to a positive conclusion. But I can tell you this. It wasn't a very comfortable feeling when I was convinced that I was right but was being told that I was wrong. And being told by government representatives who seemingly held all the power. But what is even more uncomfortable than this is to be convinced that you are right but ultimately for it to be proven that you are wrong.

We're going to be looking at God's Old Testament people this morning at a time when they were convinced they were right but ultimately God showed them that they were wrong. And we will observe that they were wrong on matters that mattered. Specifically, they were wrong on the issue of evaluating and assessing the health of their relationship with God. And on that matter, they had gotten it wrong. They were wrong on the matters that mattered. I mean, get it wrong here and it doesn't much matter what else you get right.

When it came to determining the health of their relationship with God they were convinced that things were great but they weren't. **"How is it that something that seems so right can be so wrong?"**

Trans. If someone were to ask you this morning, "How are you doing?" And to that you say what we generally say; "Oh fine", "not bad", "great", "terrific." But then if someone were to press further and say, "No really, how are you doing? How are you doing in your walk with God? How's the health of your relationship with God?" How do you answer that? What is the standard for even evaluating so that you can honestly answer that question? Thankfully, our passage this morning is going to help us answer that question. We're going to go to consider a passage from the Old Testament prophecy of Amos. So, if you have a copy of God's Word, I invite you to join me in Amos chapter 5. We are going to be considering a unit of thought which runs from 5:18-6:14. We will read it through in its entirety just to let the flavor, the mood, the emotion of the passage grip us. This passage deserves a rating of "HH" for "Hard-Hitting" as you will readily notice as we read it together beginning in 5:18.

(Read the text – Amos 5:18-6:14)

After reading a passage like this we take a deep breath and we say "wow." It is probably fair to say that this is the kind of passage that most people think of when they think of the prophetic books. A hard hitting, abrasive message of judgment that the prophet delivers on behalf of the LORD. There is more to the prophets than just messages of judgment as we see wonderful demonstrations of God's grace and forgiveness and His many promises of restoration and salvation. However, there is judgment to be sure and we see that in our passage this morning.

From a literary perspective our passage is bound together by the pronouncements of two major "woe" speeches. This word "woe" invokes the sense of "Alas", or "Ohhh my." It prompts a sense of dismay or alarm. A message of "woe" is one that nobody wants to hear. It's the kind of message that's like fingernails on the chalk board; one that sends a chilling shiver up the spine.

We wouldn't want to hear a message of woe from the Lord against us this morning any more than the Pharisees and other religious leaders wanted to hear messages of woe from the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry. And the people of Israel in the days of Amos didn't want to hear them either. Not only did they not want to hear these messages of judgment but when they did, they were shocked. When Amos bellowed these messages of judgment Israel was blown away. Israel's leaders were shocked. The upper middle-class people were jolted. They were shocked and jolted because they were convinced that everything was great. From their perspective it was hard to imagine how things could be better. ***"How is it that something that seems so right can be so wrong?"***

Trans. To help address Israel's shock Amos provides an explanation in the text before us this morning. And the prophet illustrates that **"What seems so right can be so wrong when we use the wrong standard for evaluation." When the standard I use for evaluation is my standard and not God's then what seems so right can ultimately be proven to be so wrong."**

Amos focuses on two major areas of Israel's life. Aspects of life that from Israel's perspective provided overwhelming evidence that she was doing well in her relationship with God. However, from God's perspective, things weren't so great. In fact, they were shockingly bad.

**I. The health of my relationship with God is not measured by the externals.
5:18-20; 6:1-3, 13**

Trans. The people of Israel looked at the externals of their life and they were convinced that things between them and the LORD were great. But what Amos teaches us is that:

A. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals I can be deceived. 5:18-20; 6:1-3

Trans. The first area that Amos addresses is Israel's worship in 5:18-27. Throughout the book of Amos, we observe that Israel is impressed with her own worship of the LORD and that is clearly implicit in this passage as well. However, the prophet reminds us that

1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance I can be deceived. 5:18-20

Israel had a defective view of their worship which shows up in major ways in this passage but we first see it in relation to the Day of the Lord. Israel mistakenly longed for the Day of the Lord when she needed to fear the Day of the Lord (5:18-20).

The early prophets spoke of the Day of the Lord not in a technical, systematic theology category type way but they used the term in a non-technical way as a time when God would settle the score with the enemy nations. In Obadiah for example, we read that those nations who opposed God by opposing God's people would ultimately experience the hand of God's judgment. Obadiah affirmed that this "day" would also be a time when God's people would experience the blessing of God (Obadiah 15-21).

Israel felt that that was a message that would preach. This was a wonderful message for God's people. Any prophet who wanted to show up and declare those two things to Israel would be readily received. That is why they are longing for the Day of the LORD (5:18a).

However, the problem is that this perspective reflected only a partial understanding of the Day of the LORD. The Day of the LORD would also be a time of judgment for God's people. Before there could be the blessing there had to be the purging. The Day of the Lord would also be a time when God's people would be chastened and disciplined as a means of restoring them to a place of obedience and covenant faithfulness.

Amos with irony and humor depicts the judgment as inescapable. You're out in the fields or the woods and you encounter a lion. You somehow manage to survive that fearful encounter and just when you think that perhaps this is your special day you are confronted by a bear. Somehow you also outlast the bear and now realizing that this really is not your special day you decide to race back to your house, a place of safety. You arrive back home exhausted and emotionally spent but extremely grateful. And to catch your breath you lean up against the wall of your house taking a few deep breaths and then one of those slimy, slithery, scoundrels of a snake comes along and bites you. It's poisonous and you die! Amos says, "Israel, that's the inescapability of God's judgment for you in the Day of the LORD."

They were longing for the Day of the LORD instead of fearing the Day of the Lord. They looked at the externals of their religious performance and were convinced that things were great.

Trans. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of life I can be deceived. That's true in relation to the externals of my religious performance and that's also true in relation to the externals of my material circumstances. And that's what Amos addresses in the second oracle of 6:1-14.

When Israel looked at their external material circumstances they were convinced that things were great between them and the LORD. Economically they were doing well (6:1-6) and politically, territorially they were doing well (6:13). But Amos shows us that:

2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances I can be deceived. 6:1-3, 13

If I gauge how well I am doing spiritually on the basis of circumstantial evidence it can be misleading. Numbers as in dollars and cents and square footage of real estate are not sound ways of measuring the strength of my relationship with God. Appealing to the tangibles for evaluating the health of my relationship with God can lead me to a wrong conclusion.

a. Israel's wealth had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and self-sufficiency. 6:1-3, 13

To better appreciate the impact of what Amos is saying here takes us to the historical, cultural and political context of his day. Amos is prophesying in the days of Jeroboam II who was the king of Israel and he reigned for forty years. In Old Testament history when you have a king who is reigning for an extended period of time like that it tends to speak of stability. Such was the case with Jeroboam II. For Israel, his reign was a time of incredible economic prosperity and political stability.

The Assyrian Empire was the dominant empire at the time. Each of the world empires have aspirations to expand their turf, their territory. That's one of the things that makes them world empires. Prior to Jeroboam II, Assyria had had some strong leaders and they had expanded their reach and their territory. After Jeroboam II, Assyria would have some strong leaders again and their territory would further expand. In fact, ultimately it would reach to the Northern kingdom of Israel as it did in 722 B.C. resulting in the Assyrian captivity.

So, before Jeroboam II Assyria had strong leaders, after Jeroboam II they would have strong leaders but during these forty years of Jeroboam's reign, Assyria had weaker leaders. The desire for Assyria to expand their territory had to be put on the back burner. They had bigger fish to fry. They had to maintain the borders that they already had. Since Assyria was in this era of weakened leadership some of the other nations who were subservient to Assyria thought this would be a good time to buck the system and resist. And so, they were challenging Assyria.

As a result, during this period of time Assyria left Israel and Judah alone. It was a time when Israel was able to strengthen its own military and they became a force to be reckoned with. They were not only in a position to thwart off any other nations who

wanted to challenge them but they were in a position where they could dominate other nations. When you dominate other nations you get their money, their tribute. It's additional revenue for the nation. When you're able to occupy certain territory you're able to control the trade routes which further enhances your revenue stream. These were some of the things that happened during the reign of Jeroboam II and as a result it was a time of great prosperity. So much so that there was a whole new upper middle class that emerged who got to experience wealth and luxurious living in a way that they had never experienced before (6:4-6). Politically, territorially, they recouped land that they had previously lost and in addition they gained new land (6:13).

Those were the circumstances of Israel in the days of Amos. You can see why they thought things were going so well. They looked at their bank book; their profit and loss statements. They looked at the square footage of their real estate holdings and concluded that these things were all evidences of God's approval. But God had a different perspective. God looked at their externals and saw their complacency, their pride, their self-sufficiency and a spirit of invincibility. Instead of their material gain driving them closer to God it made them increasingly insensitive to God.

So, my question for you today is, "How are you doing?" You say, "Oh great", "not bad", "good", "terrific." No but really, how are you doing in your relationship with God? What's the health of your relationship with God this morning?

You might say, "Well I think I'm doing pretty good. You know, I started one of those reading- through-the-Bible-in-a-year programs at the beginning of January. I not only made it through the first month but I'm still at it. In fact, this is July 30th and I'm already at August 3rd. I'm not only on track but I have a few days banked just in case of a "rainy day." I think I'm doing Ok."

Someone else says, "You know, for the last three months, every Sunday whenever these doors have been opened, I've been here. I always sit in the same place and for each of these Sundays, my spot has been filled because I've been here; present and accounted for. I'd say I'm doing Ok."

Again, someone else says, "Real estate is booming in our town. You place your house on the market with a good asking price and you can still get significantly more than what you ask for it. So, we sold our place. We sold our 3-bedroom house and got a five bedroom. We gave up the single car garage and got a three-car garage. I never thought we'd be able to do that but we did. I don't know, I think I must be doing something right. I guess He's pleased with me."

Is that how we do it? Is that how we measure the health of our relationship with God? That's what Israel was doing? And Amos says, that when we do that, when we measure the health of our relationship with God by the externals of life, we can be deceived.

Trans. Not only can it lead to self-deception but...

B. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27; 6:4-11, 14

We see God's displeasure communicated clearly in both of these oracles. We see it in relation to their worship and we see it with respect to their material gain. We see God's displeasure communicated in a two-fold way. We see it in His words of rejection and condemnation and then we see it in His promise of judgment.

We see it first of all with respect to their worship as Amos reminds us that:

1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27

Israel mistakenly believed that because they were pleased with their worship that God was pleased with it as well. However, such was not the case. And...

a. God's displeasure is seen in His **words of rejection**. 5:21-23

5:21-23 makes powerfully clear that God was not pleased with their worship. Notice the hard-hitting words of the LORD as He presents His perspective on the legitimacy of their worship. He says, "I hate your worship; it brings me no pleasure (5:21). I will not accept your worship (5:22). Your songs are just noise and I will not listen to it" (5:23). This news flash of God's displeasure with their worship was jolting to Israel. They thought their worship would make them immune to the judgment of God. They were thinking "God can't judge us ... He loves our worship!"

Trans. But God can judge them and He will judge them because in verses 26-27

b. God's displeasure is seen in His **promise of the judgment of exile**. 5:26-

27

God promises to send them beyond Damascus which the people in Amos' day would have understood to mean Assyria. Even the false gods from Mesopotamia will not prevent God from executing His judgment of exile upon Israel. God is not only displeased with their worship but He promises the ultimate covenant curse of exile as His judgment against them.

Trans. We see the same thing in the second oracle as well.

2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances God is not pleased. 6:4-11,14

a. God's displeasure is seen in His **words of condemnation**. 6:4-6

Amos in these verses describes the luxury lifestyle of the wealthy elite. This wealthy

class was enjoying the lifestyle that traditionally had been associated with royalty. The poor would have been glad to have a bed of any kind but the rich had beds decorated with ivory (6:4a). Stretched out on their couches conveys not merely the idea of comfort or relaxation but the notion of laziness or drunkenness or both (6:4b). Their choice of menu reflected the finest of dining as they enjoyed lamb and veal while eating meat was a rarity for most in Israel (6:4). "The general population lived on wheat and barley and whatever fruits and vegetables were at hand, and if they had meat at all, reserved it for the times of high celebration..." (Hubbard 2009, 204)

Trans. Not only do we see God's displeasure in His words of condemnation but...

b. God's displeasure is seen in His **promise of the judgment of exile**. 6:7-11,14

God's promised judgment for Israel would be tailor made (6:7), certain (6:8) and thorough (6:9-11) and it climaxed with the promise of exile (6:14). Once again, the ultimate covenant curse of exile would be enacted as Israel would be expelled from their land, thereby demonstrating God's displeasure.

Trans. Why was God so disillusioned with Israel? Why was God so passionately disillusioned with their worship? Why was He so unimpressed with their prosperity both economically and politically?

It's important that we pause to clarify something that is crucial. God was not opposed to sacrifices, offerings, festivals, celebrations and music. It was after all His idea. It was He who gave the instructions to Israel. God wasn't opposed to the rituals of Israel's worship any more than He is opposed to you reading through your Bible in a year; or to your regular attendance here at the meetings of the church.

And neither was God opposed to Israel's material gain and wealth per se. After all, it was He who promised in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 "you obey me and I will bless you." Economically, I will multiply your herds and your crops. Politically I will bless you. You will be the head and not the tail." God was not opposed to their wealth in and of itself any more than He's opposed to us having a place to live.

So why is it then that God was so disillusioned with Israel? Why was He so put off by their worship? Why was He so unimpressed with their prosperity?

It's because Israel was mesmerized by the externals. They were addicted to the externals of ritual. They were intoxicated by numbers in terms of the dollars and cents of their bottom line, and the numbers of their square footage of real estate. Israel was concerned only with the externals but God was looking for something more. And God has always been looking for something more ... and that something more is our heart. Because from God's perspective...

II. The health of my relationship with God is to be measured by my heart of devotion. 5:24-25; 6:12

Trans. We see the importance of the heart highlighted twice over in our passage. In both oracles we see that God is concerned with the heart. We see this in 5:24 and again in 6:12. And here we are reminded that:

A. We need to have a heart of devotion that is concerned with the things that concern the heart of God. 5:24-25; 6:12

As we have observed Israel was concerned with the number of the feasts, the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, the peace offerings, the fattened animals, the quality of the songs, the performance of their harps. In contrast, the LORD was concerned with what was behind all of those things. Israel was concerned with the things you could see. God was concerned with what you couldn't see. Israel was concerned with the externals; the LORD was concerned with the internal. Israel was concerned with the surface of the matter. The LORD was concerned with the "heart" of the matter. The bottom line is that for the follower of the Lord, a heart of devotion needs to be concerned with the things that concern the heart of God.

Matters of the heart from the Lord's perspective are here described in 5:24 in terms of justice and righteousness. Israel was concerned about the *abundance* of their sacrifices, their offerings, their festival celebrations whereas God says He is passionate about the *abundance* of justice and righteousness. He here describes this idea of abundance in terms of "justice rolling down like waters" and "righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24).

Now hold that thought. Remember these two things - justice and righteousness. Come over now to 6:12. Two rather strange questions are asked in 6:12a. "Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen?" The anticipated answer is "of course not." It would be foolish to run horses on the rocks because of how it would hurt their feet and it would be silly to try to plough the rocks with oxen. You would destroy your equipment and injure your animals. That would be foolish.

The Lord's point is that it likewise was foolish for Israel to pervert righteousness and justice. As far as Israel was concerned, justice was to be avoided like poison. Doing things in the right way was as bitter as wormwood; a bitter medicine used for such things as expelling parasites from one's intestines.

This emphasis on justice and righteousness is a reference to a problem that was present in Israel in Amos' day and it's an issue that permeates the book of Amos. It is the problem of social injustice.

The matter of social justice is a major theme throughout the Scriptures because it portrays the heart of God. God is concerned for the poor, the disenfranchised, those on the peripheral, those without a voice, the widow, the orphan, the alien. We see the emphasis

of God's concern for these matters of social justice in God's provisions for the poor, the widows, orphans and aliens in the OT law. We see social justice celebrated in the psalms and it's a major theme throughout the prophetic books. The Lord Jesus modeled His concern for the poor, the vulnerable and those who society had thrown to the curb. These matters are a concern to the Lord and it is to be a concern for us as the church as well. It's to be a concern for us because it's a concern to the heart of God.

The problem in the days of Amos is that God's people were pretending to be authentic in their worship of God while violating the Law and the fundamental dignity of their fellow Israelites. The powerful, the elite, the rich, those who were part of the wealthy upper middle-class were consistently taking advantage of the vulnerable, the poor and those who didn't have a voice. The Law was being violated as exorbitant interest rates were levied against those who had to borrow. Judges and arbiters were being bribed with money and wine so that the people were deprived of a fair hearing when their matters came before the courts.

Sunday through Friday the wealthy, the powerful, took advantage of their fellow man but on the Sabbath, they put on their best clothes, made sure everything externally, everything on the outside was just so ... as they came to worship Yahweh. They failed to perceive that genuine worship of the LORD was linked with genuine treatment of others. They failed to perceive that genuine worship was not a matter of external ritualistic obligation but rather it was a matter of the heart. While they were religious and meticulous in the sacrifices and offerings they brought to God, they were careless and ignored the thing that mattered most - a true heart of devotion.

They built their wealth on the backs of the poor, the disenfranchised, the people without a voice. For them justice was to be avoided like poison and doing things righteously was viewed as bitter. Because when you're committed to justice and righteousness you can't use fake scales and false bushels. You can't contract to do a job for \$6000 and then show up with an invoice for \$10,000 for no good reason. But that's what Israel did. And they ignored what mattered most - a heart of devotion; a heart that was moved by the things that move the heart of God. They violated God's concern for social justice in the interests of self-promotion and selfish gain.

Trans. Israel was shocked when Amos announced that God was not pleased with them. They were in disbelief to learn that God was not impressed with their worship and their material gain. They were jolted and shocked because they needed to learn what we need to be reminded of this morning as well. We too need to be reminded that: **The health of my relationship with God is not measured by the externals of life but by my heart of devotion.**

Conclusion

Well how does this reality impact us this morning? We know a healthy relationship with God is important but how would we know if we had one? How do you measure that? And if we had one, how do you keep it? How do you maintain it?

Our passage reminds us this morning of the importance of the heart; the control center of my life. The place where my relationship with God is forged, strengthened and nurtured.

Gordon MacDonald in his book "Ordering Your Private World" tells the story of a close friend who was an officer aboard a United States Navy nuclear submarine. His friend relayed the story of how "one day while the sub was on duty in the Mediterranean, many ships were passing overhead on the surface and the submarine was having to make a large number of violent maneuvers to avoid possible collisions."

"In the absence of the captain," MacDonald's "friend was duty officer, in charge of giving the commands by which the submarine was positioned at each moment. Because there was such a sudden and unusual amount of movement, the captain, who had been in his own quarters, suddenly appeared on the bridge, the control center for the submarine asking, "Is everything all right?" "Yes, sir!" was the friend's reply. The captain took a quick look around and then started back out through the hatch to leave the bridge. As he disappeared he said, "It looks all right to me too." (MacDonald 1984, 20)

When the commander appeared on the bridge to assure himself that everything was in order, it was. And when things were in order there, the submarine was secure no matter what the external circumstances.

MacDonald states that biblical writers believed in the principle of the bridge too. What navy language calls the "bridge", the control center, the Bible calls the "heart"; the control center of your life and your relationship with God.

So, our question this morning is "How's your heart?" Because the overarching challenge is that we keep our heart. That we nurture our heart. That we maintain the vibrancy of our heart of devotion. A wise father once said to his son, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows out of it." Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

The question that begs to be answered is "How do we guard our heart?" I want to suggest two things.

We guard our heart by engaging in a right kind of thinking. We engage in a right kind of thinking this morning by reminding ourselves that **the measure of determining the health of my relationship with God is not by the externals of life but by the vibrancy of my heart's devotion.** We need to let that truth permeate our minds this week because that way of thinking does not come naturally to us. It's counter-intuitive.

We like our checklists. As people we are given to the externals because they're tangible. We can measure them. We can see them. We can feel them. And while those externals can all be good, they are to be driven by a heart of devotion; by a heart that is in sync with the heart of God.

Trans. We guard our hearts by engaging in a right kind of thinking. But not only that...

We guard our heart by engaging in a right kind of doing. There are no surprises here and there is no quick fix. The right kind of doing involves us engaging in the spiritual disciplines that God's word challenges us to. It includes our worship, our time in the Word, our time in prayer, our time in solitude, corporately meeting with God's people. It involves each of these things among others. These are all things that God calls us to.

But here is the challenge as I see it. The very things we do to nurture our heart are the very things we can be tempted in our carnal, fleshly moments to appeal to in order to convince ourselves that we are doing well. And so, we live with that tension.

Author Tim Keller in speaking about living for the Lord says we need to be motivated to do it "not merely by compulsion out of a sense of duty but by an inner desire out of a sense of his beauty." (Keller 2015, 195) We need to do it "not merely by compulsion out of a sense of duty"; (that speaks to the externals) but by an inner desire out of a sense of His beauty; (that speaks to our heart). As we nurture our heart that's how we strengthen our inner desire that flows from a sense of His beauty.

So, the challenge for us this morning is "Guard your heart" because if we get that right the other things in life will be right too. Get that wrong and it ultimately doesn't much matter what else you get right. Guard your heart so that you don't experience the unwelcome discovery that **"what seems so right can be so wrong."** Guard your heart because:

"The health of my relationship with God isn't measured by the externals but by my heart of devotion!"

Summary Of Key Steps Involved In Going From Prophetic Text To Sermon As Illustrated In Amos 5:18-6:14

1. Set the Minor prophetic book within the context of the Old Testament.

We have identified Amos as an eighth century prophet prophesying to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II 786-746 B.C. As an eighth century prophet he is one of the earliest writing prophets and is prophesying well in advance of the Assyrian captivity.

2. Set the prophetic passage within the context of the prophetic book.

Having established an outline of the book of Amos we are then able to place our preaching passage within a section of the book featuring a series of judgment of messages. Our preaching passage contains the messages of woe.

3. Ensure that the passage is a literary unit.

The preaching passage comprises a literary unit inasmuch as it is linked together by the pronouncement of two major woe oracles.

4. Identify clues that confirm if the passage is a judgment or salvation oracle.

It is clear that the passage is a judgment oracle because of the pronouncements of woe upon the nation of Israel. Also, the main elements of a judgment speech are present within each oracle, namely the messenger formula, reason for judgment and Yahweh's declaration of action.

5. Identify the clues that confirm the particular genres and literary forms that are found within the passage. Evaluate how these particulars should impact the construction and delivery of the sermon.

The presence of the word "woe" is indicative that a literary form of a woe oracle is being employed by the prophet. The sermon references that a message of woe from the LORD strikes a sense of awe, fear and being overwhelmed; emotions which are readily captured just by reading the text.

6. Identify the historical, cultural and political context of the original audience and how these elements impact the particular preaching passage.

The historical, cultural and political context plays an important role in unwrapping the message of this selected preaching text. The economic prosperity of the days of Jeroboam II made possible by a weakened Assyria features prominently in both oracles. The extravagant lifestyle of the wealthy elite is a dominant feature in the second oracle. Understanding how this prosperity came about resulting in a new upper middle class that now enjoyed luxury that heretofore was reserved for royalty helps underscore the realities Amos addressed.

Securing their wealth even at the cost of engaging in a variety of social injustices as they violated the dignity and value of the poor features prominently in both oracles.

Understanding how this reality came to be helps the listener to gain a clear understanding of why the LORD is offended by the actions of His people and why He pronounces these stern messages of judgment upon them.

7. Identify any historical events or allusions that are present within the passage that will need to be understood and explained in order to capture the meaning of the passage.

Examine what the reference to the wilderness years in 5:25 conveys regarding how Israel worshiped the Lord? Also, it is important to explore the meaning of 6:13 and the places of Lo-debar and Karnaim.

8. Identify the key exegetical and interpretive issues in the passage that need to be studied in order to gain an understanding of the passage.

Some of the key items identified in this passage include the following. What is the Day of the LORD and how did Amos' audience understand this term? Secondly, why does the Lord hate the very sacrifices and rituals that He commanded His people to bring to Him? Thirdly, linking justice and righteousness to the problem of the social injustices of the day is an important element to both passages. Fourthly, identifying the images of 5:26 and the role that they play in the judgment of exile needs to be explored in the preacher's studying of this passage. Fifthly, what is the lesson to be learned from the cities of Calneh and Hamath of 6:2-3? Sixthly, interact with why it is significant that the penalty judgment of exile is present in both oracles. Explain that exile was the ultimate covenant judgment the Lord could bring against His people and this penalty reflects the seriousness with which the Lord regarded these covenant violations. Seventhly, the rhetorical questions of 6:12 underscores the foolishness of Israel to disregard the importance of justice and righteousness in administering their social affairs. Eighthly, understanding the significance of Lo-debar and Karnaim and the play on words that is present in 6:13 is also important.

9. Be sensitive to the employment of poetry and prose in the passage.

For example, observe the poetry of 5:21-24. Notice the repetition reflected in the parallelism which builds to the crescendo of what the Lord desires; namely, justice and righteousness. Similarly, in 6:12 the rhetorical questions in 12a lead up to the metaphors underscoring their commitment to injustice.

10. Begin the process of constructing your sermon from the prophetic passage in the manner that you would construct your message from other parts of the Bible including the following major elements:

A. Establish an exegetical outline and exegetical idea of the passage.

B. Establish a homiletical outline and homiletical idea for the passage.

11. Explore ways and opportunities to apply the message of the prophetic text to a twenty-first century audience beginning with surfacing a need in your introduction and reinforcing your preaching idea in your conclusion.

What does the passage contribute to a greater understanding of God and His people? Be sensitive of who your audience is and how the message of the prophet relates to them. For example, consider how the message of the prophet applies corporately to the church, to an individual follower of Jesus or to society as a whole.

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SUPPLEMENT 4.2 – CLASS HANDOUT (PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

Session 1: THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF AMOS

Goals:

At the end of this session each participant should be able to explain the important contribution that the historical and geopolitical context plays in understanding the ministry and message of the prophets by being able to:

1. Identify the four dominant world powers during the time of the Minor Prophets
2. Identify Israel's king who was reigning during Amos' ministry and why the political context of his time allowed him to lead his kingdom to a time of economic prosperity and political expansion and stability.

I. Four Primary World Powers Dominated The Geopolitical Landscape Of The Ancient Near East During The Time Of The Minor Prophets.

A. Assyria, Babylon and Persia

These three nations were located to the north of Israel. Assyria and Babylon occupied the area today identified as Iraq while Persia is linked with modern day Iran.

B. Egypt was located to the south of Israel and was the dominant southern power. Due to Egypt's close geographical proximity to Judah it often exerted a powerful influence in the southern kingdom. (Cox 1983, 138)

C. Summary Quote

Israel and Judah lay on the western perimeter of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Late in the seventh century, that Mesopotamian power fell to another, the Neo-Babylonians. Then, midway through the sixth century, Persia, an empire with its roots to the east of Mesopotamia, decimated the Babylonians. Each of these empires at one time or another placed troops in Syria-Palestine. Life in both Israel and Judah was thus, in considerable measure, a function of foreign imperial activity. The Neo-Assyrian empire destroyed Israel in 721, the Neo-Babylonian Empire destroyed Judah in 587, and the Persian Empire allowed for and funded partially the rebuilding of Judah as a province within the empire. Each of these three nodal moments receives attention in the Twelve. (Petersen 2002, 171)

II. Summary And Chart Of The Minor Prophets And Dominant Powers

Understanding the geopolitical context of the world scene is essential to appreciating both the message of the prophets and the challenges they faced.

For the pre-exilic prophets the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were major issues impacting their ministries as the threat of captivity and potential national extinction were almost always a present reality for Israel and Judah. (Cox 1983, 138)

For the post-exilic prophets, the rise and subsequent dominance of the Persian empire following the demise of the Babylonians forms an important background to their ministries.

III. The Historical And Geopolitical Context Of The Ministry Of Amos

A. Amos' Ministry And The Reign Of King Jeroboam II

1. Amos 1:1 places Amos' ministry during the reign of King Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.) of Israel and King Uzziah (783-742 B.C.) of Judah.
2. King Jeroboam II's reign was a time of political stability, economic prosperity and geographical expansion.

B. The Neo-Assyrian Empire And Israel In The Days Of Jeroboam II

The Neo-Assyrian empire extends from 745-612 B.C. and is important to the biblical landscape in which some of the prophets ministered and it is during this time that the empire reached its zenith. (Kaiser 1998, 357; Tenney 1977, 372)

Prior to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian empire, Assyria had experienced a decline following the death of Tiglath-Pileser I who reigned in Assyria from 1116-1076 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser I expanded the borders of Assyria more than any of their previous leaders. Under his leadership Assyria extended its reach as far west as the coast of Syria.

Subsequent to the death of Tiglath-Pileser I, Assyria experienced a period of decline. While Assyria remained the dominant power, the Arameans in the west were able to establish a kingdom with its center in Damascus. They were also able to exert pressure on the borders of Assyria. (Tenney 1977, 374-376)

Assyria rose to prominence again during the rule of a series of individuals beginning with Ashur-dan II (933-910 B.C.) and extending through to Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.). Shalmaneser III was effective in leading Assyria in a period of expansion. (Tenney 1977, 376)

However, towards the end of the reign of Shalmaneser III the empire experienced a period of internal dissent and weakened leadership. As a result, Assyria was not an immediate threat to Israel in the early part of the eighth century. Due to both the internal and external pressures exerted on the empire Assyria was not in a position to seek to expand her empire. Instead, she had to focus on securing what she already had. (Appendix F, Map of Assyrian Empire;

Tenney 1977, 376; Paul 1991, 1-2; Kaiser 1998, 357)

A weakened Assyria enabled Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.) to lead the northern kingdom through a time of stability, expansion and prosperity. This record of expansion and prosperity is the context for the ministry of Amos and the messages he delivered as the following historical summary substantiates.

C. The Relationship Between Syria And Israel In The Days Of Jeroboam II

In addition, to the larger powers of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt, the smaller nation of Syria was frequently a frustrating neighbor to the north of Israel. While there were occasions in which a common adversary compelled them to cooperate together, overall, the relationship between Israel and Syria was adversarial as the following biblical passages confirm.

1. Prior to King Jeroboam II Israel experienced adversity by the Syrians.

Israel during the reigns of King Jehu (841-814 B.C.) and King Jehoahaz (814-798 B.C.) was dominated by Syria. (Kaiser 1998, 347)

- a. Syria dominated Israel in the reign of King Jehu.

2 Kings 10:32

"In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the Valley of the Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan."

- b. Syria dominated Israel in the reign of King Jehoahaz.

2 Kings 13:3, 7 records events during the reign of King Jehoahaz

"And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael ... For there was not left to Jehoahaz an army of more than fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing."

2 Kings 13:22-23

"Now Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now."

2. In response to King Jehoahaz' prayer the LORD delivered Israel from Syria by the intervention of the Assyrians.

2 Kings 13:4-5

"Then Jehoahaz sought the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them. Therefore the LORD gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly."

History confirms that Assyria was the "savior" provided by the LORD as Adad-Nirari III defeated Damascus in 802 B.C. and placed Ben-Hadad II, Aram's ruler, under a heavy tax. (Smith & Page 1995, 25)

3. Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz became king of Israel in 801 B.C. and began to rebuild the kingdom of Israel.

2 Kings 13:24-25

"When Hazael king of Syria died, Ben-hadad his son became king in his place. Then Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again from Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities that he had taken from Jehoahaz his father in war. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel."

D. The Relationship Between Judah And Israel In The Days Of Jeroboam II

Israel under King Jehoahaz had begun the process of rebuilding the northern kingdom by recapturing territory formerly under their possession and also by exerting dominance over the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 14:1-14). These two actions prepared the way for King Jeroboam II and King Uzziah to live peaceably for the next several years.

With Assyria's power weakened and Syria now dominated by Israel, both the northern kingdom of Israel and Judah entered into a period of great prosperity; economic prosperity and political stability.

E. During The Reign Of King Jeroboam II Israel Enjoyed Forty Years Of Non-interference By The Assyrians And Experienced Political Stability And Economic Prosperity.

1. The weakened Assyrian empire provided a time of unprecedented opportunity for Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II. There were strong Assyrian leaders prior to Jeroboam II and there would be strong leaders following his death. However, during his reign Assyria's weaker leaders made them more vulnerable and necessitated the need for them to focus on the territory already under their control. As a result, Israel was free from Assyrian threat during the reign of Jeroboam II.

2. During the reign of Jeroboam II Israel was also free from the domination of Syria who were under the control of Assyria.
3. Israel and Judah lived peaceably during the reign of Jeroboam II.
4. The stability characterizing King Jeroboam II's reign allowed the kingdom to geographically expand.

2 Kings 14:25-27

"He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash."

Of this time period the commentator Paul writes, "During this period, the Silver Age of Israelite history, Israel reached the summit of its material power and economical prosperity as well as the apogee of its territorial expansion, comparable only to the era of David and Solomon, the Golden Age." (Paul 1991, 1)

5. The expanded geographical kingdom yielded economic gains resulting in major economic prosperity for the northern kingdom as indicated in the prophecy of Amos.
6. Regarding the feats of Jeroboam II, Kaiser states, "In less than twenty-five years Jeroboam II was able to take a nation that was just about ready to die and turn it into one of the great powers of his day." (Kaiser 1998, 352)

Conclusion:

The lack of a dominant foreign national threat, especially the non-interference of the Assyrians combined with the peaceful coexistence between Israel and Judah during the reign of Jeroboam II provided a time of stability for the northern kingdom resulting in economic prosperity and geographic expansion for the kingdom. This historical and geopolitical context helps account for some of the spiritual issues which emerged during this time period which Amos addressed in his prophecy.

SUPPLEMENT 4.2 - CLASS HANDOUT (PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

Session 2: THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES CONFRONTING GOD'S PEOPLE IN AMOS

Goals:

At the end of this session each participant should be able to describe the importance of identifying the spiritual challenges confronting God's people and how these issues impact the prophet's ministry by being able to identify the three key spiritual challenges Amos addressed in his prophecy.

Introduction

There are three major sins confronting God's people which Amos addresses in his book and the seriousness of these sins account for why God's judgment must come upon His covenant people.

I. Amos Confronts The Sin Of Social Injustice.

Social injustice is a key matter that Amos references frequently throughout his prophecy.

A. What Accounts For The Prevalence Of Social Injustice In Amos' Day?

A royal military bureaucracy ruled Israel at this time. As this bureaucracy expanded it acquired more and more land and gradually commandeered the economy and legal system. At various administrative levels, it invited bribery and other dishonest practices. The common people outside the administrative centers, through confiscatory taxation, conscription, excessive interest rates, and other oppressive measures, were gradually disenfranchised and lost their landed property and, with it, their means of survival and their rights as citizens. (Chisholm 2002, 385)

B. Key Passages In Amos Addressing Social Injustice

1. Observations from Amos 2:6-7

2. Observations from Amos 4:1-3

3. Observations from Amos 5:11-12, 14

4. Observations from Amos 8:4-6

B. Israel's Social Injustice Is Offensive To God And Would Result In His Judgment Of Exile.

II. Amos Confronts The Sin Of Materialism.

A. There Is A Relationship Between Israel's Social Injustice And Their Greed.

B. Key Passages In Amos Addressing Materialism

1. Observations from Amos 3:15
2. Observations from 6:1-14
3. Observations from 8:4-6

III. Amos Confronts The Sin Of Hypocritical Ritualistic Worship.

A. Israel Practiced A Syncretistic Worship Which Blended The Worship Of Baal And The Worship Of Yahweh.

The corrupt, hypocritical worship characterizing Israel in the days of Amos was the result of seeds that were planted much earlier in their history.

Israel had a long-standing fascination with idolatry and the worship of Baal as a brief survey of their history reveals.

1. An overview of Israel's fascination with idolatry and Baal worship
 - a. Exodus 32
Israel brought their idolatrous tendencies with them from Egypt and it clearly demonstrated itself when Aaron built the Golden Calf.
 - b. Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:1-10
Moses commanded against marrying foreign women warning that peoples' hearts would be divided between worshipping Yahweh and the gods of foreigners. This warning proved true as evidenced in the experience of King Solomon.
 - c. 1 Kings 11-12
Upon the division of the kingdom King Jeroboam I introduced a new corrupt worship system which included worship centers established in both ends of the kingdom, Dan to the north and Bethel to the south, as well as the establishment of a new non-Levitical priesthood
 - d. 1 Kings 16:29-34
King Ahab and Queen Jezebel built a temple in Samaria devoted to the worship of Baal.
 - e. 1 Kings 18:13-19
Baal worship flourished as it was embraced both by the leadership and common people
 - f. 1 Kings 19:18; 2 Kings 10:18-20
Resistance to Baal worship was practiced both by Elijah and by King Jehu
 - g. Summary
Despite these resistances against Baal worship it continued to be practiced and a syncretistic worship blending Baal worship and the worship of Yahweh was present in the days of Amos.
2. A Summary of the Key Elements of Baal Worship
The following summary of the key elements of Baal worship in Israel in the days of Amos underscores its offensiveness to Yahweh and the unfaithfulness of God's covenant people.

The god Baal was but one of a pantheon of deities worshiped by the Canaanites. As the son of El and Asherah, he was the rain and storm god whose chief concerns were agricultural fertility and sexual reproduction among, animals and humankind. Mot, the god of sterility and death was Baal's eternal rival. According to Canaanite mythology, the season of rain

and plenty and drought and famine were the consequence of the perpetual conflict between Baal and Mot.

To aid Baal in his struggle against the god Mot, Canaanite worship of the storm god included human sacrifice and ritual prostitution (cf. Ps. 106:34-41; Deut. 23:17). These male and female prostitutes were employed by the local shrines and were considered "priests" and "priestesses" of the gods. The people of Canaan engaged in sacred sexual intercourse with the cult prostitutes as part of Baal worship to ensure fertility by reenacting sacramentally the god's marriage to the land as Baal (or "lord, husband") of the earth ... Unsure if they could trust Yahweh for the rain necessary for life in Palestine, Israel chose to mix Yahwism and Baalism in a syncretistic religion. (Hill & Walton 2009, 589-591)

B. Israel's Mechanistic View Of God Enabled Them To Engage In The Worship Of Yahweh While Living In Disobedience To The LORD.

There was a profound disconnect between Israel's worship and their lifestyle. Israel perceived that as long as they brought their sacrifices to Yahweh, He would be pleased even if they engaged in disobedience to the LORD in other areas of their life.

C. Key Passages In Amos Addressing Israel's Hypocritical Worship

1. Observations from Amos 2:8
2. Observations from Amos 4:4-5
3. Observations from Amos 5:18-27
4. Observations from Amos 8:5a

Conclusion:

These three major sins of social injustice, materialistic greed and ritualistic/hypocritical worship are themes which weave their way through the prophecy of Amos. The prophet consistently warns Israel of future divine judgment climaxing with the penalty of exile if they fail to repent (cf. 8:7-14).

In preaching the book of Amos, the preacher will be sensitive to the presence of these major sins in our culture and therefore their relevancy for today's audience.

SUPPLEMENT 4.2 - CLASS HANDOUT (PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

Session 3: THE LITERARY GENRES OF THE BIBLE AND KEY ELEMENTS OF PROPHETIC GENRE

Goals:

At the conclusion of this session the participants should be able to explain the significant contribution that genre makes in communicating the message of the text by being able to:

1. Identify at least four different kinds of genre comprising biblical literature.
2. Identify at least four distinctive elements of prophetic genre.

Introduction

Within the normal routines of daily living we encounter various types of communication; different literary genres, whether it is government notices, postcards, newspaper articles or joke books. So also, within the Bible we find various literary types of communication as the following verses reflect.

"In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins..." Ephesians 1:7

"That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him." Mark 4:35-36 NIV

"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." Psalm 2:1-3

"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense. All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you." Song of Solomon 4:1-7

"A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads." Revelation 12:1-3

I. The Bible As Literature

A. The Bible Is God's Truth To Us Presented Creatively And Artistically.

"The teacher searched *to find just the right words*, and what he wrote was *upright and true*." Ecclesiastes 12:10 NIV (italics added)

"The Preacher sought to find *delightful words* and to write *words of truth correctly*." Ecclesiastes 12:10 NASB (italics added)

The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that the Bible is God's truth *and* the Bible is literature and *since* the Bible is literature it *must* be read and understood as such.

C. S. Lewis writes: "There is a sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are." (Lewis 1961, 10)

This means that in addition to studying the Bible theologically and historically, a literary approach is also essential to the process.

II. The Major Genres Of The Bible

While the Bible contains a varied mixture of genres, the dominant literary genres are story or narrative, poetry, proverb and visionary writings (which includes prophecy and apocalypse). (Ryken 1984, 26)

III. Genre Defined And Described

David Aune provides a helpful definition of genre when he states, "A literary genre may be defined as a group of texts that exhibit a coherent and recurring configuration of literary features involving form (including structure and style), content and function." (Aune 1987, 13)

Leland Ryken provides a functional description of a literary genre when he indicates that it is nothing less than a "norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text." (Ryken 1984, 25.)

Stated even more simply a "genre is the literary term for a type or kind of writing." (Ryken 1992, 14)

IV. The Importance Of Genre

A. Genre Is Part Of The Message.

Understanding genre is important because the genre determines how the literature is to be read and how it is to be understood.

The genre impacts not only *what* is being said but *how* it is being said.

The genre not only conveys a message but it is actually part of the message.

B. Genre Determines How The Text Is To Be Understood.

Each genre is characterized by distinctive features and there are therefore specific rules or guidelines to be followed when one interprets a text from a respective genre. Identifying and understanding the various literary genres prepares the reader for how the text is to be read and interpreted.

C. The Implications Of Prophetic Genre

When it comes to the prophetic books, we must be sensitive to the prophetic genre and various literary forms that are at work. Because as we have previously stated, "The genre not only conveys a message; it is actually part of the message."

V. General Characteristics Of Prophetic Genre

A. The Prophets Were Theocentric.

The primary function of a prophet was to declare a message that not only had God as its source but also its subject.

Greidanus writes, "Biblical scholars generally agree that prophets were messengers of God, heralds who delivered a communication from God... The message of the prophets was not only a message *from* God, however, but also a message *about* God, his covenant, his will, his judgment, his redemption, his coming kingdom." (Greidanus 1988, 229)

The prophets were careful to emphasize that their words were not of human origin but were in fact that very words of God. The frequent messenger formulas employed such as "This is what the LORD says" (Jeremiah 32:42) and "The LORD spoke to me again" (Isaiah 8:5) convey the authority by which they spoke.

However, not only are their words divine in origin but they are also centered on God. The messages of the prophets were Theo-centric. Elizabeth Achtemeier in speaking about the varied forms the prophets used in declaring their message affirms that their message was always centered on God. She writes,

This form [of prophetic oracle] undergoes wide variations in the Major Prophets ... but the emphasis on God's activity remains, and is present in all the principal genres of prophetic literature. Whether the form is that of woe oracle pronounced over the dead (Is 5:8-10) legal procedure (Is 41:21-24), parable (Is. 5:1-7), lamenting dirge (Jer 9:17-22) prophetic torah or teaching (Is 1:10-17), salvation oracle (Jer 35:18-19), priestly oracle of salvation (Is 41:8-13) or allegory (Ezek 17:1-21), the principal reference is to the activity of God among his people or among the nations as a whole, and no

sermon from the prophetic literature truly deals with those oracles unless it deals with that dynamic of Yahweh's activity. (Cox 1983, 120)

B. Forth-telling And Foretelling

Forth-telling and foretelling are two major components of biblical prophecy.

1. Forth-telling

Forth-telling relates to messages the prophets directed to their contemporary audience as they addressed the current circumstances facing the people and the nation.

Frequently their messages exposed the peoples' covenant unfaithfulness and challenged them to repentance and godly living while warning them of the consequences of judgment.

While people often associate foretelling or predictive prophecy as the dominant feature of biblical prophecy the majority of the prophet's ministry was comprised of forth-telling. (Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard 2004, 371)

2. Foretelling

Foretelling or predictive prophecy was also an important part of the prophet's ministry as God disclosed to the prophet future happenings that were to transpire.

Sometimes these predictions entailed a near fulfillment while at other times a more distant fulfillment was in view.

These predictions in keeping with the covenant promises were frequently warnings of judgment as well as promises of hope and restoration. The prophets declared these realities to their current generation and such foretelling was intended to encourage God's people to pursue faithful covenant living.

C. Prose And Poetry

Prophetic literature is made up mostly of poetry. As a result, when the prophets speak, their speech is often characterized by such features as rhythm and parallelism. This poetic element is one of the key challenges people face in reading and understanding the prophets.

Robert Alter provides insight regarding why the prophets relied on poetic expression to such a great extent when he states, "poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communication, not only solemn, weighty, and forceful but also densely woven with complex internal connections, meanings, and implication. [Thus] it makes sense that divine speech should be represented as poetry." (Alter 1985, 141)

However, not everything in the prophets is poetry as only five of the prophetic books are completely written in poetic form, namely, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. (Greidanus 1988, 240)

One of the helpful clues for the reader is the observation that when the prophets are not themselves directly speaking God's words to the people, those sections will generally be written in prose. In other words, the prophetic speeches will typically be written in poetic form while the narrative or historical sections and the biographical and autobiographical accounts will be in prose.

Also, generally when God speaks to the prophet prose will be the preferred style of communication. (Greidanus 1988, 240; Ryken & Longman 1993, 305; Alter 1985, 138)

VI. Distinctive Elements Of Prophetic Genre

A. Claus Westermann Contribution – Accounts, Speeches And Prayers

1. Claus Westermann

- a. Is one who has significantly influenced the study of prophetic genre and he identified the three major literary forms which comprise prophetic speech as accounts, speeches and prayers.

2. Accounts

- a. Are narratives that relate to the prophets.

3. Prayers

- a. Provide a record of the words spoken by people directed to God.

4. Speeches

- a. Communicate the words of God or the messages from God spoken by the prophets to the people.
- b. Exist as one of two kinds, namely, judgment speeches or salvation speeches and the prophets employ this form more than any other.

B. Prophetic Judgment Speeches

1. Typically Consist of Three Key Elements
 - a. The Messenger Formula: "Thus says the Lord" or "The Lord spoke to me" (Amos 1:3; Isaiah 8)
 - b. A Statement Explaining the Reason For Yahweh's Action(s)
 - c. A Declaration of Yahweh's Action
2. Judgment speeches can be directed against both individuals or nations including both foreign nations as well as God's covenant people.
3. The purpose of such announcements was to inform the subject(s) of the imminent wrath of God or to warn them of such judgment in order to induce repentance and avert the punishment. (Sandy & Giese 1995, 22)
4. Examples of Judgment Speeches

Amos 1:3-5;
Amos 1:6-8;
Amos 1:9-10;
Amos 1:11-12;
Amos 1:13-15;
Amos 2:1-3;
Amos 2:4-5;
Amos 2:6-16.

Isaiah 14;
Hosea 4;
Ezekiel 6, 7, 30;
Jeremiah 44:1-6.

C. Prophetic Speeches Of Salvation

1. Typically Consist of Three Key Elements
 - a. The Messenger Formula - e.g. "Thus says the LORD"
 - b. A Statement of Reassurance
 - c. A Description of Future Transformation

2. Examples of Salvation Speeches

a. Jeremiah 32:42-44

The Messenger Formula 42a

The Reassurance 42b

The Future Transformation 43-44

b. Jeremiah 32:36-41

The Messenger Formula v36a

The Reassurance cf. 32:27

The Future Transformation v37-41

c. Amos 9:11-12

The Messenger Formula

Statement of Reassurance

Description of Future Transformation

d. Amos 9:13-15

The Messenger Formula

Statement of Reassurance

Description of Future Transformation

D. The Implications Of Prophetic Speeches For Preaching

1. Remember that prophetic speech is the dominant literary form of prophetic genre.
2. Determine at the outset if the unit of thought is a judgment or salvation oracle.
3. Determining the type of prophetic speech will impact the form one's sermon takes or the mood that is captured in the unit of thought.

VII. Additional Literary Forms Of Prophetic Genre

Some of the more frequently employed literary forms in judgment speeches by the prophets include the following forms:

A. Woe Oracles

1. Purpose of Woe Oracles
Oracles of woe provide the prophet a means to communicate God's message of judgment with great intensity and these oracles should be heard as "expressions of prophetic outrage at the sinful behavior they condemn." (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 2004, 362)
2. Features of Woe Oracles
 - a. Woe oracles are identifiable by the occurrence of the word "woe" or "alas" which occur at the beginning of the speech evoking a sense of dismay or alarm.
 - b. The pronouncement of woe is followed by a general description of the offensive behavior or an unflattering depiction of the people along with an announcement of the specific judgment they will experience.
 - c. Woe oracles generally do not include an introductory messenger formula.
 - d. Woe oracles frequently appear in clusters in the prophetic books.
3. Examples of Woe Oracles
Amos 5:18-6:7
Habakkuk 2:6-19
Micah 2:1-5
Isaiah 5

B. Covenant Lawsuit

1. General Description of A Covenant Lawsuit

2. Elements of A Covenant Lawsuit

a. The Opening Appeal

The "Opening Appeal and Call for the People to Listen" often includes a summons in which the hills, mountains, heavens or the earth are called as witnesses.

b. The Questioning of Motives and Actions

The Lord frequently inquires of the people where He has gone wrong in the treatment of them. In view of the many great things He has done for His people one would expect a response of obedience and faithfulness. The people must therefore account for their wayward behavior.

c. The Charges

God brings charges against His people which generally includes a summary description of God's faithfulness in contrast to the covenant violations of His people.

d. Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment

The lawsuit concludes with a pronouncement of guilty and a sentence of judgment.

3. Examples of Covenant Lawsuits

a. Micah 6

The Opening Appeal 6:1-2

The Questioning of Motives and Actions 6:3

The Charges 6:4-12

Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment 6:13-16

b. Jeremiah 2:4-37

The Opening Appeal 2:4

The Questioning of Motives and Actions 5-9

The LORD's charge 10-35a

Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment 35b-37

c. Hosea 4

The Opening Appeal 4:1a

The LORD's charge 4:1b-2

Pronouncement of Guilt and Sentence of Judgment 4:3-19

C. Disputation

1. The Purpose of a Disputation

The goal of a disputation is the same as that of the covenant lawsuit, namely, to "leave the opponent devoid of further argumentation and resigned to the divine decision." (Ryken & Longman 1993, 303)

2. Disputations and Rhetorical Questions

Disputations often use rhetorical questions as a means of engaging the audience.

e.g. Malachi effectively uses disputations using rhetorical questions in order to communicate his message for the people.

3. Typically Consist of Three Key Elements

a. A Declaration

b. A Discussion

c. A Refutation

4. Examples of Disputations

a. Malachi 1:2-5

A Declaration 1:2a

A Discussion 1:2b-4

A Refutation 1:5

b. Malachi 1:6-14

A Declaration 1:6

A Discussion 1:7-13

A Refutation 1:14

c. Habakkuk

d. Amos 3:3-8

A Declaration 3:7

A Discussion 3:3-6

A Refutation 3:8

D. Funeral Lament or Dirge

1. The Purpose or Function of a Dirge Was to Shock the Audience.

2. Key Elements of a Dirge

- a. Call to Hear
- b. The Dirge
- c. The Messenger Formula
- d. The Prediction

3. Examples of a Dirge or Funeral Lament

a. Amos 5:1-3

Call to Hear
The Dirge
The Messenger Formula
The Prediction

b. Jeremiah 9:17-22

Call to Hear
The Dirge
The Messenger Formula
The Prediction

c. Isaiah 14:4-23

Call to Hear: n/a
The Dirge: 4-14
The Messenger Formula: 22b,23b
The Prediction: 15-22a, 23a

E. Oracles Against Foreign Nations

1. Are Frequently Used By The Prophets.

2. A Two-fold Function of Oracles Against Foreign Nations

- a. God is sovereign over all peoples and holds the nations accountable.

- b. It reminds God's people that He will protect His people.

3. Examples of Oracles Against Foreign Nations

Amos 1-2;
Jeremiah 46-51
Obadiah
Ezekiel 25-32
Nahum

F. Prophetic Narratives

1. Vocation Reports

Are also referred to as "call narratives" and they provide for us the story of the prophet's call and commission.

a. Purpose of Vocation Reports

Affirm the legitimacy of the prophet's call and their authority to speak for God.

b. Examples of Vocation Reports

Isaiah 6
Jeremiah 1
Ezekiel 1-3
Amos 7:14-15

2. Symbolic Actions

Refers to those symbolic actions that the prophets enact as part of their prophetic message.

a. Purpose of Symbolic Actions

They are attention getting and they illustrate and reinforce the prophet's message.

b. Examples of Symbolic Actions

Jeremiah 13: Jeremiah and the linen belt
Hosea 1-3: Hosea's marriage to Gomer- Hosea 1:2-9
Ezekiel 4-5: Ezekiel's various enactments

G. Vision Reports

1. A Description of Vision Reports

- a. Vision reports consist of things the prophet saw or heard that communicated or illustrated God's message.
- b. Vision reports can be identified by such terms or phrases as "see", "made to see" or "and behold" which is generally followed by a recounting of the vision.

2. The Nature and Purpose of Prophetic Vision Reports

- a. Sometimes vision reports utilize normal everyday objects, like the figs in Jeremiah 28 or the plumb line in Amos 7 which the prophet uses as a means to illustrate his prophetic message from the LORD and give his word from the Lord.
- b. Sometimes vision reports are very unusual in appearance as illustrated in apocalyptic literature where unusual creatures and images are depicted having eschatological implications wherein a special angelic messenger reveals God's intent and revelation to the prophet, who subsequently communicates the revelation he has just received.

Conclusion:

Identifying the key elements of prophetic genre and the literary form(s) found within the literary unit of study is a foundational part of the preacher's preparation. It is key in order for the preacher to grasp the meaning of the text and it will also impact the form of the sermon the preacher will preach. For example, a sermon dealing with a series of woes will capture a different mood or tone than a positive restoration salvation oracle.

SUPPLEMENT 4.2 - CLASS HANDOUT (PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

Session 4: EXEGETICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PREACHING THE PROPHETS

Goals:

At the end of this session each participant should:

1. Understand the importance of establishing the context of the Minor prophetic books by being able to identify at least three main considerations that help place the prophetic books within the broader Old Testament context.
2. Be able to list four important steps to take in order to set the prophetic passage in its proper context.
3. Explain the relevancy of preaching the Minor Prophets today by being able to identify at least three subject categories from which application can be made to today's audience.

Introduction

Biblical students and preachers alike acknowledge that reading with understanding and preaching the Old Testament prophets has its challenges. However, wrestling through the challenges is a worthy initiative which yields rewarding dividends. Ryken and Longman remind us of both the challenge and reward:

Even a trained scholar like Douglas Stuart can lament that "the prophetic books are among the most difficult parts of the bible to interpret or read with understanding" (Fee and Stuart 149). In the page of prophecy one meets many strange names. Some play major roles on the stage of earth's history (e.g., Hezekiah, Gedaliah). Long-departed people (e.g., Assyrians, Philistines) and ancient cities (e.g. Nineveh, Thebes) dot the prophetic landscape. While all of this is no more of a problem for prophecy than for other types of biblical literature (e.g. historical narratives, poetry), the very fact that the prophets deal with real people and the problems of the ancient world assures readers that their quest will be a rewarding one. Prophecy is designed to be relevant to everyday life. Moreover, the principles resident in the prophetic record are those that are applicable to the needs of every reader. In cases where a prophecy stands fulfilled (e.g. Isa. 37:33-37; Hos. 1:4), the reader is further assured that God is in control of all of earth's history, including the life of each individual person. (Ryken & Longman 1993, 299)

Convinced of the relevancy of the prophets for today's audience, the preacher needs to be aware of some of the key exegetical and hermeneutical considerations that will help the preacher unearth the prophetic message. Following is a review of some of these important elements that will assist today's preacher in the preparation of effective expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets.

I. Key Exegetical Considerations In Preaching The Minor Prophets

A. Examine The Historical, Cultural And Political Context Of The Prophetic Book And The Preaching Passage In Particular.

Establishing the historical, cultural and political context of the prophetic book is essential as the beginning step for determining what the text meant to the original audience. Ascertaining what the passage meant to the original audience must first be established before one is able to make the connection of what the passage means for a current twenty-first century audience.

Bible dictionaries are a helpful resource in garnering an understanding of the historical context. Fee and Stuart suggest reading a Bible dictionary article on a prophetic book before beginning a study of that book. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 189)

Commentaries are useful tools in gaining an understanding of the historical context by means of their introductions. They also are important for gaining a fuller understanding of individual verses by means of the commentary they provide.

While Bible handbooks, in contrast to Bible dictionaries and commentaries are not as thorough in their introductions or as extensive in their commentary on individual verses, they serve a useful role in gaining an overview understanding of larger "chunks" of prophetic books in a briefer amount of time. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 189)

B. Set The Minor Prophetic Book Within The Context Of The Old Testament.

1. The Timeline of the Prophetic Books

The prophetic books were written during a relatively brief period of Israel's history. A typical conservative dating approach of the prophetic books renders that these books were written during a period of time of approximately three hundred years, 760 B.C. to 460 B.C. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 190)

Recognizing this kind of timeline makes the task of discovering how the books relate to each other and the overall canon more manageable.

2. One Old Testament People, Two Kingdoms

It is foundational to remember that following the united kingdom under Israel's first three kings, Saul, David and Solomon, the kingdom divided resulting in the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. While the prophets will sometimes address both kingdoms, generally one particular kingdom is predominantly in focus.

3. The Captivities

The threat of exile as the ultimate covenant curse is frequently employed by the prophets and forms an important backdrop to some of the Minor prophetic books. It is key to remember that the northern kingdom of Israel experienced captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah experienced captivity at the hands of the Babylonians in three stages beginning in 605 B.C. and climaxing with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The return from the Babylonian captivity began in 538 B.C. and forms the background of the post-exilic prophetic books, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi as they document the reestablishing of the people back to their land. This historical period is described in Ezra and Nehemiah.

These considerations are some of the main "hooks" upon which much of the prophetic material hangs as the prophets declare their messages of warning, hope and comfort to God's people.

C. Set The Passage Within The Context Of The Prophetic Book.

Having established the context of the book within the Old Testament it is important to gain an understanding of how the parts of the book fit together.

1. Capture the Big Picture.

One of the key ways of observing how a book fits together is to identify the theme and key purpose of the book. Ascertain the big picture of the book and then assess how the various component parts fit together with that overarching purpose. This part of your study will also assist the preacher when it comes to preaching a particular portion of the book and ensuring that one is preaching a literary unit.

The outline of the book of Amos used in this project illustrates how an understanding of the overall theme or purpose of the book can be established by observing the key components or elements of the book. One of the helpful ways of establishing the outline of the book of Amos is to observe key phrases or terms and in particular the repetition of such phrases and words.

D. Remember The Importance Of Working With A Literary Unit.

It is imperative when preaching any sermon that the preacher ensures that they are dealing with a literary unit. Some helpful ways of discovering a literary unit can include the following:

1. Observe any repetition of key phrases or words.
2. Does the writer change the subject or discussion?
3. Is there a shift in pronouns?

4. Observe any occurrence of inclusio sometimes identifiable by means of "opening and closing formulae, refrains and use of bookending words/ideas." (Ryken & Longman 1993, 300)
5. Be aware of the genre and literary form which will help prepare you for what to look for.
6. Most translations use paragraph designations.

II. Key Hermeneutical Considerations In Preaching The Minor Prophets

A. Remember General Characteristics Of The Prophetic Writings.

1. Prose vs. Poetry, Forth-telling vs. Foretelling and Theocentric Focus

Sensitivity to whether the text is prose or poetry, forth-telling versus foretelling as well as the overall Theo-centric focus of the prophetic books are some of the important distinctions to remember.

a. Prose and Poetry

Identify if your literary unit consists of prose or poetry or both. Prophetic speech that consists of the prophet addressing the people with a message from God will generally be written in the genre of poetry. Narrative or historical sections and biographical and autobiographical accounts will be in prose.

Poetry must be understood and interpreted in accordance with proper hermeneutical considerations. For example, consideration needs to be given to rhythm and the stylistic features characteristic of the varied kinds of parallelism and the importance of concrete imagery.

Poetry was a desired and chosen method whereby the prophets communicated God's message because it was more memorable. Culturally, the people were accustomed to important events being preserved by means of poetry. This was particularly important for a culture that was largely non-literate and where individual ownership of written documents was rare. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 197-198)

b. Forth-telling vs. Foretelling

Remember that most of the ministry of the prophet is forth-telling as the prophet is addressing his contemporary audience concerning the current circumstances facing the people and the nation.

Consider Amos 1-2 where most of the judgment oracles were for the immediate or near future. In Ezekiel 25-29 and Jeremiah 46-41 the judgment oracles mostly against foreign nations were largely fulfilled within a few decades.

Examine your text where predictive prophecy occurs and determine if it has near fulfillment or a long-distance fulfillment. Determine if it has been fulfilled already in the past or is it prophecy that awaits an eschatological fulfillment?

Consider Amos 9:11-15.

c. **Theocentric Focus**

Since the prophetic books have a Theo-centric focus it is always important to observe the instruction that the selected preaching passage holds regarding the nature of God and His activity in the lives of His people and/or the peoples of the world.

2. The Importance of the Covenants

An understanding of the various covenants is crucial to understanding the messages of the prophets. It is important to read the prophetic books through the lens of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, as well as the Davidic and New Covenants.

3. Conditional or Unconditional Prophecies

In studying and understanding the prophetic text the student needs to discern whether prophecies are conditional or unconditional.

a. **Unconditional Prophecies**

Unconditional prophecies are those promises or prophecies that God has committed to fulfilling unilaterally and are not dependent upon human response. Some of these prophecies are related to promises that are part of the Abrahamic, Davidic or New Covenants. By contrast, with conditional prophecies God's response is conditioned on the obedience or disobedience by the nation or individuals. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30 are clear examples of promises of blessings or warnings of judgment conditioned by responses of obedience or disobedience.

b. **Conditional Prophecies**

Regarding conditional prophecies it is imperative for the interpreter of Scripture to remember that the conditional elements of prophecies can be implied as well as stated explicitly. For example, the statement of Jeremiah in 18:7-10 provides an insight that applies not only to his prophecy but to prophetic speech in general. He writes,

"If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it."

On the other hand, the prophecy of Jonah serves as an example of conditional prophecy that is implied. Jonah was reluctant to take God's message of judgment to Nineveh because he believed that they would repent and if they repented, he knew that God would relent and be merciful to them. However, it is significant to observe there is nothing of any conditional element that can be found within Jonah's prophecy (Jonah 4:1-2).

B. Remember The Key Elements Of Prophetic Genre And The Literary Forms.

When seeking to determine and understand the message of the prophet, it is essential to remember the key elements of prophetic genre as part of the hermeneutical process.

1. Think Oracles/Speeches.

When studying prophetic books and isolating individual sections it is helpful to think "oracles" in a similar way that one thinks paragraphs when studying the epistles. (Fee and Stuart 2003, 193)

Begin by determining if the section is a judgment oracle or a salvation speech.

2. Identify Literary Forms.

If the oracle is a judgment speech it is important to identify what type of literary form is employed by the prophet and the characteristic elements of that form.

3. Genre and Form Impact the Preacher's Sermon.

Identifying the particular kind of oracle and literary forms the prophet employs is key for the preacher for at least two reasons.

- a. It helps alert and prepare the preacher for how to listen to or understand the text.
- b. Knowing the genre and literary form will impact how the preacher constructs and delivers his sermon. For example, preaching a sermon from a woe oracle will have a different mood and tone than preaching a salvation oracle.

III. Important Considerations For Applying The Message Of The Prophets To A Twenty-first Century Audience

A. Social Justice/Injustice

Social justice is a subject the prophets address numerous times including many occurrences in the book of Amos. Social justice matters are treated alongside the subject of idolatry and are regarded as equally serious offences. From God's perspective, matters of social justice remain important today even though the church has not always regarded these matters to be as important as they are. (Duvall & Hays 2005, 378)

However, in today's culture in North America, millennials and postmoderns are characterized by a concern for social justice matters. Social justice initiatives however need to be rooted and anchored to biblical and theological convictions. The prophets scream with a concern for social justice and powerfully articulate that these concerns reflect the heart of God. This major emphasis found within the prophetic books gives today's preacher the opportunity to demonstrate the relevancy and applicability of the prophet's message to a twenty-first century audience.

In Amos, examples of social injustice included unfairness in the judicial courts due to bribery, unfair and corrupt business practices by business leaders who took advantage of the vulnerable, as well as the general practice of the powerful taking advantage of the powerless including inflicting inhumane treatment upon them. The prophets make clear that God has a heart for justice and is repulsed and offended when the influential trample on the rights of the vulnerable and needy. The preacher can authoritatively preach the important theological principle from the prophetic text that God is concerned for the poor and the vulnerable. From this principle the preacher can powerfully communicate that "followers of Jesus need to be moved by the things that move the heart of God" and therefore must themselves be concerned about social justice matters.

The important challenge in applying this truth is to identify today's social justice issues. Duvall and Hays lament that for many in North America today concern for social justice issues are defined more by political affiliation than the teaching of Scripture. They write, "The biblical interpretive challenge for us is not to have Republican views or Democrat views, but rather Christian views – views anchored in biblical theology rather than in secular culture." (Duvall & Hays 2005, 379)

We need to identify who the vulnerable are today in our culture and society. Who are those in our neighborhood who do not have a voice or the means to defend themselves? Some who fit within this description might include the poor, the elderly, the unborn, single mothers, the abused, illegal immigrants, widows or widowers among others.

From the prophetic books it is clear that God held His covenant people responsible for caring for the disenfranchised. Followers of Christ today will sense the urgency of the issue of social justice as we realize that God still holds His people responsible for protecting and caring for the vulnerable. This message permeates the prophetic writings and will resonate with a twenty-first century audience.

B. Ritualistic Hypocritical Worship And The Value Of Being Authentic

Addressing Israel's struggle with ritualistic and hypocritical worship is another point of application which allows today's preacher to demonstrate the relevancy of the prophetic text for today's audience. While it was God who instituted the idea of sacrifice and ritual the prophets regularly condemn ritualistic worship. As demonstrated in Amos, God is repulsed when ritualism and routine in worship replaces a heart of devotion. Israel was guilty of engaging in routine without allowing their worship to impact their behavior and ethics. Their worship did not flow from their relationship; their worship did not flow out of a heart of devotion. While ritual can assist the believer in the development of their relationship with God it is not a substitute for it. (Duvall & Hays 2005, 380)

From an application standpoint, as believers today we are aware of the tension between these two elements in our own experience. For example, do we read our Bible because of our love for God or out of a legalistic sense of duty? Have we ever suffered from the superstition that if we miss our devotions during a busy morning that we will end up having a very bad day?

Postmodern people value that which is authentic. They place a premium on that which is genuine. Israel was guilty of hypocrisy which angered God. Therefore, postmoderns will understand a sense of God's displeasure when the preacher addresses the disconnect that often exists in the lives of God's people between what we know and how we live and the imperative to address this hypocrisy. The need for authentic, genuine worship is a theme woven throughout the prophetic books. As such these books provide the preacher with the opportunity to address a twenty-first century audience on the need to be authentic and genuine; a subject they are already keenly sensitive to.

C. Covenant Unfaithfulness: The Analogy Of Marriage And Wounding The Heart Of God

There are significant differences between the prophet's original audience and that of the preacher today. As followers of Christ, we are not under the Old covenant and its covenant curses. We are not part of a theocracy despite how God-fearing one's country used to be. And we are not under the threat of invasion by enemy nations who intend to exile us. In what sense then do the prophet's messages containing these elements have relevancy for people today?

A regular feature of the prophet's message is that people have sinned and judgment awaits unless they repent. It is important to realize today that for the unbeliever sin against God ultimately results in severe consequence of eternal judgment unless they repent. For the believer who sins today, it is a serious offense against God but it is an offense that is covered by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though our sin is atoned for by the sacrifice of Christ whereby we receive forgiveness, this is not to result in a flippant attitude toward sin by the believer (Romans 6:1-2).

While the believer today is not under the Old Testament covenant with the impending threat of exile, there still remains a powerful application for believers from these messages of warning issued by the prophets. Duvall and Hays provide a helpful insight when they encourage the reader (and preacher) today to focus on the relational collateral damage that our sin causes. A favorite analogy employed by the prophets to depict Israel and Judah's covenant unfaithfulness is the unfaithful spouse. Israel and Judah as the bride married to Yahweh have been unfaithful.

This analogy effectively conveys the emotional hurt experienced by Yahweh when He is betrayed by His bride. If we view our sin against God in the same manner as we view breaking the law of the land, this important emotional consequence is not captured. If we are guilty of a driving infraction and are caught, we pay a fine but there is little if any emotional consequence to our action. This is not so however in our relationship with our Lord. While there is no threat of exile or foreign invasion for us, and while our sin is forgiven by the blood of Christ, our sinful actions still hurt and offend God and damage our relationship. Intimacy in our relationship with Him will be lost until confession and repentance occurs.

As a result, for the preacher today when dealing with the judgment passages, even though significant particulars do not apply to a twenty-first century audience, the principle that our sinful actions cause emotional pain and injury to our God preventing intimacy in our relationship with Him remains the same. (Duvall and Hays 2005, 378)

D. Idolatry

The prophets consistently confront God's people over the sin of idolatry. The particular idolatry confronting the people in the days of Amos related to the worship of Baal. The sin of idolatry also characterizes God's people today and this reality provides an opportunity for the preacher to demonstrate the relevance and applicability of the prophetic text to today's audience. While our struggle today is not the worship of Baal our idols are many. They can include one's personal relationships, reputation, vocational aspirations, recreational pursuits, money, materialism as well as a host of other things. Today's North American

audience knows that we are sometimes tempted to allow these kinds of things to crowd out our love for God.

E. The Challenge Of Authority

The prophetic books celebrate that God is sovereign over all nations and peoples; not just over His covenant people but over all of humanity. God's sovereignty is one of the great themes of Scripture. Those who align themselves with God's sovereignty go with God and those who resist His sovereignty ultimately lose (cf. Amos 7 - Amaziah). This emphasis provides a valid preaching and connecting point for today's preacher in addressing people in our postmodern, North American culture. Today's culture in general is anti-establishment and anti-authority and the challenge which this reality presents can be legitimately and effectively addressed from the Minor Prophets.

F. The Consummation Of God's Program And The Reality Of Hope

Postmoderns have by and large lost hope in human institutions and no longer embrace the reality that things are going to get better and better. While modernism advanced many wonderful discoveries and innovations making life easier and more comfortable, no longer is it believed that science can provide all of the answers to solve life's dilemmas. Most recognize that the challenges which face us as a society, both locally and globally, are beyond the reach of our best leaders and politicians to resolve.

However, the prophetic books celebrate that God is up to something. He knows what He is doing and where His program is headed. In Him hope is found through the arrival of the Messiah and the ultimate delivery of the kingdom made possible through the work of salvation accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. This great prophetic theme of hope resonates with humanity's greatest longings and is a message that today's preacher can champion to those in a pessimistic postmodern culture.

Conclusion:

Studying the prophetic biblical text can be challenging for the preacher. However, this session has demonstrated that when the message of the biblical writer is correctly understood within its context, it yields a number of important concepts and themes that can be readily applied to today's twenty-first century audience.

AN ILLUSTRATION

MOVING FROM PROPHETIC TEXT TO SERMON FOR A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AUDIENCE USING AMOS 5:18-6:14

Following is an illustration of how to move from the prophetic text to crafting a sermon for a twenty-first century audience using the literary unit of Amos 5:18-6:14.

Four major components comprise this section. An exegetical outline and idea is included followed by a homiletical outline and idea. A manuscript of a sermon from this passage is then provided. Finally, a summary of some important steps to consider when preaching from a prophetic passage is provided with commentary on how these steps were included in the preparation for this sample sermon.³

³ The catalyst for preaching this sermon was an invitation from a church to participate in a special summer series on the Minor Prophets. My assignment was to give a single message of approximately fifty minutes from the book of Amos that would provide the congregation with a summary of the key issues of the book. The current passage was selected inasmuch as it addresses the three dominant issues in the book of Amos, namely, ritualistic worship, materialistic greed and social injustice. However, if one were conducting a preaching series through the entire book of Amos or preaching a single sermon with time constraints of a thirty-minute message, then the author would recommend dealing with each woe oracle separately. The same exegetical and preaching outline could be adapted to either oracle.

Exegetical Outline and Idea of Amos 5:18-6:14

I. Amos announced God's judgment of exile upon Israel for their hypocritical worship and social injustice. 5:18-27

- A. Amos announced Israel's inescapable judgment in the Day of the Lord. 5:18-21
- B. Amos announced God's rejection of Israel's worship. 5:22-23
- C. God desired that Israel's worship would flow from a heart of devotion marked by a commitment to social justice. 5:24-25
- D. Amos announced that Israel's hypocritical worship would result in God's judgment of exile. 5:26-27

II. Amos announced God's judgment upon Israel's wealthy elite because their materialistic greed had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and false sense of security. 6:1-3

- A. Amos pronounced a woe judgment upon Israel's wealthy elite 6:1a
- B. The materialistic greed of Israel's wealthy elite had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and false sense of security. 6:1b-3

III. Amos announced judgment against Israel climaxing with exile because the wealthy elite valued their extravagant lifestyle and military accomplishments more than faithful covenant living. 6:4-14

- A. Amos condemned Israel's pursuit of an extravagant lifestyle while having no concern for the well-being of the nation. 6:4-6
- B. Amos announced God's judgment of exile against Israel because of their social injustice and pride. 6:7-14
 - 1. Amos announced that God's judgment would be tailor made, certain and thorough. 6:7-11
 - 2. Amos announced that Israel was guilty of social injustice. 6:12
 - 3. Amos exposed Israel's pride over their military accomplishments. 6:13
 - 4. Amos announced God's judgment of exile against Israel. 6:14

Exegetical Idea:

Israel's covenant unfaithfulness manifested in social injustice, hypocritical worship and materialistic greed resulted in God's promised judgment of exile.

Homiletical Outline and Idea of Amos 5:18-6:14

I. The health of my relationship with God is not measured by the externals. 5:18-20; 6:1-3, 13

- A. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals I can be deceived. 5:18-20; 6:1-3, 13
 - 1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance I can be deceived. 5:18-20
 - a. Israel longed for the Day of the Lord when they should have feared the Day of the Lord. 5:18-20
 - 2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances I can be deceived. 6:1-3, 13
 - a. Israel's wealth had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and self-sufficiency. 6:1-3, 13
- B. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27; 6:4-11, 14
 - 1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27
 - a. God's displeasure is seen in His words of rejection. 5:21-23
 - b. God's displeasure is seen in His promise of the judgment of exile. 5:26-27
 - 2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances God is not pleased. 6:4-11, 14
 - a. God's displeasure is seen in His words of condemnation. 6:4-6
 - b. God's displeasure is seen in His promise of the judgment of exile. 6:7-11, 14

II. The health of my relationship with God is measured by my heart of devotion. 5:24-25; 6:12

- A. We need to have a heart of devotion that is concerned with the things that concern the heart of God. 5:24-25; 6:12

Homiletical Idea: The health of my relationship with God isn't measured by the externals but by my heart of devotion.

Sermon Manuscript of Amos 5:18-6:14

"What Seems So Right Can Be So Wrong"

Introduction

"How is it that what seems so right can be so wrong?"

You know it's not a very comfortable feeling when you are convinced that you are right but you are being told that you are wrong. Have you ever experienced that? Perhaps you've been there? Maybe we've all been there.

Several years ago, I was surprised to get a voice mail message from the Registrar General's office in Thunder Bay (Ontario). I had been preparing for a wedding and I reached into my filing cabinet and pulled out my file containing the marriage documents you have to fill out to make everything legal. As I reached into my file I pulled out my last form. This wasn't a problem but it just meant that I needed to order more forms so I would have one on hand for the next wedding that I would officiate. So, I sent off my order to Thunder Bay to the Registrar General. A few days later I received their voice mail message indicating that they were not able to process my order; not because they didn't have any more documents but because I wasn't authorized to perform marriages.

You can appreciate that I was anxious to quickly return their call and clear up the misunderstanding. However, I wasn't very far into the conversation when it became clear that from their perspective, there was no misunderstanding. I really was not authorized to perform marriages.

In my response, I pushed back and said, "I'm a little confused. I'm sitting here at my desk and I'm looking at my registration license with the number that your office issued me several years ago. I have been using that registration number for these last several years. How can that be?" Their short reply was, "I'm sorry sir you are not authorized to perform marriages." So, I attempted to push back a little harder. I said, "You know on those marriage documents there's that section on the very back of the forms, that type-A personalities like myself have the option of filling in. And when we fill that section in your office will mail back that self-addressed postcard sized piece of paper confirming that your office received the completed paperwork and that everything has been finalized. I said, "I have a stack of those returned cards that I am looking at." "I'm sorry sir, you are not authorized to perform marriages. You will need to fill out a new application and when you complete that application, we will give you your new registration authorizing you to conduct marriages. And just to make everything easy, we will give you that same number that you have been using all along!"

So, over the next couple of weeks I worked at filling out the application, getting the required documents from the church leaders that I needed as part of the process. And as I was working at assembling the various documents I thought I'd make one last call to the Registrar General's office. Perhaps, I could get talking to someone else and get this problem resolved. So, I called again but it was a very short conversation as they assured me that I really did need to submit the application.

However, it was just a few short minutes later that the telephone rang. It was the Registrar General's office confirming that there was no need to worry; that everything was now OK. I no longer needed to submit my application. They explained that during our last conversation a former employee, who was now retired, had dropped into the office to see some of his former co-workers, and he just happened to overhear the one end of the conversation. And when the individual to whom I had been speaking hung up the phone, he asked, "What was that conversation all about?" thinking that he already knew. When he was fully briefed on the issue, he said, "Have you checked downstairs in the basement?" Prior to this individual retiring, the office had run out of storage space so they packed up several of these files putting them in boxes and placed them in special storage in the basement of their building. And sure enough, they went downstairs and found my file containing all of my necessary credentials authorizing me to perform marriages.

I was happy to see that whole exercise come to a positive conclusion. But I can tell you this. It wasn't a very comfortable feeling when I was convinced that I was right but was being told that I was wrong. And being told by government representatives who seemingly held all the power. But what is even more uncomfortable than this is to be convinced that you are right but ultimately for it to be proven that you are wrong.

We're going to be looking at God's Old Testament people this morning at a time when they were convinced they were right but ultimately God showed them that they were wrong. And we will observe that they were wrong on matters that mattered. Specifically, they were wrong on the issue of evaluating and assessing the health of their relationship with God. And on that matter, they had gotten it wrong. They were wrong on the matters that mattered. I mean, get it wrong here and it doesn't much matter what else you get right.

When it came to determining the health of their relationship with God they were convinced that things were great but they weren't. **"How is it that something that seems so right can be so wrong?"**

Trans. If someone were to ask you this morning, "How are you doing?" And to that you say what we generally say; "Oh fine", "not bad", "great", "terrific." But then if someone were to press further and say, "No really, how are you doing? How are you doing in your walk with God? How's the health of your relationship with God?" How do you answer that? What is the standard for even evaluating so that you can honestly answer that question? Thankfully, our passage this morning is going to help us answer that question. We're going to go to consider a passage from the Old Testament prophecy of Amos. So, if you have a copy of God's Word, I invite you to join me in Amos chapter 5. We are going to be considering a unit of thought which runs from 5:18-6:14. We will read it through in its entirety just to let the flavor, the mood, the emotion of the passage grip us. This passage deserves a rating of "HH" for "Hard-Hitting" as you will readily notice as we read it together beginning in 5:18.

(Read the text – Amos 5:18-6:14)

After reading a passage like this we take a deep breath and we say "wow." It is probably fair to say that this is the kind of passage that most people think of when they think of the prophetic books. A hard hitting, abrasive message of judgment that the prophet delivers on behalf of the LORD. There is more to the prophets than just messages of judgment as we see wonderful demonstrations of God's grace and forgiveness and His many promises of restoration and salvation. However, there is judgment to be sure and we see that in our passage this morning.

From a literary perspective our passage is bound together by the pronouncements of two major "woe" speeches. This word "woe" invokes the sense of "Alas", or "Ohhh my." It prompts a sense of dismay or alarm. A message of "woe" is one that nobody wants to hear. It's the kind of message that's like fingernails on the chalk board; one that sends a chilling shiver up the spine.

We wouldn't want to hear a message of woe from the Lord against us this morning any more than the Pharisees and other religious leaders wanted to hear messages of woe from the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry. And the people of Israel in the days of Amos didn't want to hear them either. Not only did they not want to hear these messages of judgment but when they did, they were shocked. When Amos bellowed these messages of judgment Israel was blown away. Israel's leaders were shocked. The upper middle-class people were jolted. They were shocked and jolted because they were convinced that everything was great. From their perspective it was hard to imagine how things could be better. ***"How is it that something that seems so right can be so wrong?"***

Trans. To help address Israel's shock Amos provides an explanation in the text before us this morning. And the prophet illustrates that **"What seems so right can be so wrong when we use the wrong standard for evaluation." When the standard I use for evaluation is my standard and not God's then what seems so right can ultimately be proven to be so wrong."**

Amos focuses on two major areas of Israel's life. Aspects of life that from Israel's perspective provided overwhelming evidence that she was doing well in her relationship with God. However, from God's perspective, things weren't so great. In fact, they were shockingly bad.

**I. The health of my relationship with God is not measured by the externals.
5:18-20; 6:1-3, 13**

Trans. The people of Israel looked at the externals of their life and they were convinced that things between them and the LORD were great. But what Amos teaches us is that:

A. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals I can be deceived. 5:18-20; 6:1-3

Trans. The first area that Amos addresses is Israel's worship in 5:18-27. Throughout the book of Amos, we observe that Israel is impressed with her own worship of the LORD and that is clearly implicit in this passage as well. However, the prophet reminds us that

1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance I can be deceived. 5:18-20

Israel had a defective view of their worship which shows up in major ways in this passage but we first see it in relation to the Day of the Lord. Israel mistakenly longed for the Day of the Lord when she needed to fear the Day of the Lord (5:18-20).

The early prophets spoke of the Day of the Lord not in a technical, systematic theology category type way but they used the term in a non-technical way as a time when God would settle the score with the enemy nations. In Obadiah for example, we read that those nations who opposed God by opposing God's people would ultimately experience the hand of God's judgment. Obadiah affirmed that this "day" would also be a time when God's people would experience the blessing of God (Obadiah 15-21).

Israel felt that that was a message that would preach. This was a wonderful message for God's people. Any prophet who wanted to show up and declare those two things to Israel would be readily received. That is why they are longing for the Day of the LORD (5:18a).

However, the problem is that this perspective reflected only a partial understanding of the Day of the LORD. The Day of the LORD would also be a time of judgment for God's people. Before there could be the blessing there had to be the purging. The Day of the Lord would also be a time when God's people would be chastened and disciplined as a means of restoring them to a place of obedience and covenant faithfulness.

Amos with irony and humor depicts the judgment as inescapable. You're out in the fields or the woods and you encounter a lion. You somehow manage to survive that fearful encounter and just when you think that perhaps this is your special day you are confronted by a bear. Somehow you also outlast the bear and now realizing that this really is not your special day you decide to race back to your house, a place of safety. You arrive back home exhausted and emotionally spent but extremely grateful. And to catch your breath you lean up against the wall of your house taking a few deep breaths and then one of those slimy, slithery, scoundrels of a snake comes along and bites you. It's poisonous and you die! Amos says, "Israel, that's the inescapability of God's judgment for you in the Day of the LORD."

They were longing for the Day of the LORD instead of fearing the Day of the Lord. They looked at the externals of their religious performance and were convinced that things were great.

Trans. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of life I can be deceived. That's true in relation to the externals of my religious performance and that's also true in relation to the externals of my material circumstances. And that's what Amos addresses in the second oracle of 6:1-14.

When Israel looked at their external material circumstances they were convinced that things were great between them and the LORD. Economically they were doing well (6:1-6) and politically, territorially they were doing well (6:13). But Amos shows us that:

2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances I can be deceived. 6:1-3, 13

If I gauge how well I am doing spiritually on the basis of circumstantial evidence it can be misleading. Numbers as in dollars and cents and square footage of real estate are not sound ways of measuring the strength of my relationship with God. Appealing to the tangibles for evaluating the health of my relationship with God can lead me to a wrong conclusion.

a. Israel's wealth had produced a spirit of complacency, pride and self-sufficiency. 6:1-3, 13

To better appreciate the impact of what Amos is saying here takes us to the historical, cultural and political context of his day. Amos is prophesying in the days of Jeroboam II who was the king of Israel and he reigned for forty years. In Old Testament history when you have a king who is reigning for an extended period of time like that it tends to speak of stability. Such was the case with Jeroboam II. For Israel, his reign was a time of incredible economic prosperity and political stability.

The Assyrian Empire was the dominant empire at the time. Each of the world empires have aspirations to expand their turf, their territory. That's one of the things that makes them world empires. Prior to Jeroboam II, Assyria had had some strong leaders and they had expanded their reach and their territory. After Jeroboam II, Assyria would have some strong leaders again and their territory would further expand. In fact, ultimately it would reach to the Northern kingdom of Israel as it did in 722 B.C. resulting in the Assyrian captivity.

So, before Jeroboam II Assyria had strong leaders, after Jeroboam II they would have strong leaders but during these forty years of Jeroboam's reign, Assyria had weaker leaders. The desire for Assyria to expand their territory had to be put on the back burner. They had bigger fish to fry. They had to maintain the borders that they already had. Since Assyria was in this era of weakened leadership some of the other nations who were subservient to Assyria thought this would be a good time to buck the system and resist. And so, they were challenging Assyria.

As a result, during this period of time Assyria left Israel and Judah alone. It was a time when Israel was able to strengthen its own military and they became a force to be reckoned with. They were not only in a position to thwart off any other nations who

wanted to challenge them but they were in a position where they could dominate other nations. When you dominate other nations you get their money, their tribute. It's additional revenue for the nation. When you're able to occupy certain territory you're able to control the trade routes which further enhances your revenue stream. These were some of the things that happened during the reign of Jeroboam II and as a result it was a time of great prosperity. So much so that there was a whole new upper middle class that emerged who got to experience wealth and luxurious living in a way that they had never experienced before (6:4-6). Politically, territorially, they recouped land that they had previously lost and in addition they gained new land (6:13).

Those were the circumstances of Israel in the days of Amos. You can see why they thought things were going so well. They looked at their bank book; their profit and loss statements. They looked at the square footage of their real estate holdings and concluded that these things were all evidences of God's approval. But God had a different perspective. God looked at their externals and saw their complacency, their pride, their self-sufficiency and a spirit of invincibility. Instead of their material gain driving them closer to God it made them increasingly insensitive to God.

So, my question for you today is, "How are you doing?" You say, "Oh great", "not bad", "good", "terrific." No but really, how are you doing in your relationship with God? What's the health of your relationship with God this morning?

You might say, "Well I think I'm doing pretty good. You know, I started one of those reading- through-the-Bible-in-a-year programs at the beginning of January. I not only made it through the first month but I'm still at it. In fact, this is July 30th and I'm already at August 3rd. I'm not only on track but I have a few days banked just in case of a "rainy day." I think I'm doing Ok."

Someone else says, "You know, for the last three months, every Sunday whenever these doors have been opened, I've been here. I always sit in the same place and for each of these Sundays, my spot has been filled because I've been here; present and accounted for. I'd say I'm doing Ok."

Again, someone else says, "Real estate is booming in our town. You place your house on the market with a good asking price and you can still get significantly more than what you ask for it. So, we sold our place. We sold our 3-bedroom house and got a five bedroom. We gave up the single car garage and got a three-car garage. I never thought we'd be able to do that but we did. I don't know, I think I must be doing something right. I guess He's pleased with me."

Is that how we do it? Is that how we measure the health of our relationship with God? That's what Israel was doing? And Amos says, that when we do that, when we measure the health of our relationship with God by the externals of life, we can be deceived.

Trans. Not only can it lead to self-deception but...

B. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27; 6:4-11,14

We see God's displeasure communicated clearly in both of these oracles. We see it in relation to their worship and we see it with respect to their material gain. We see God's displeasure communicated in a two-fold way. We see it in His words of rejection and condemnation and then we see it in His promise of judgment.

We see it first of all with respect to their worship as Amos reminds us that:

1. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my religious performance God is not pleased. 5:21-23, 26-27

Israel mistakenly believed that because they were pleased with their worship that God was pleased with it as well. However, such was not the case. And...

a. God's displeasure is seen in His **words of rejection**. 5:21-23

5:21-23 makes powerfully clear that God was not pleased with their worship. Notice the hard-hitting words of the LORD as He presents His perspective on the legitimacy of their worship. He says, "I hate your worship; it brings me no pleasure (5:21). I will not accept your worship (5:22). Your songs are just noise and I will not listen to it" (5:23). This news flash of God's displeasure with their worship was jolting to Israel. They thought their worship would make them immune to the judgment of God. They were thinking "God can't judge us ... He loves our worship!"

Trans. But God can judge them and He will judge them because in verses 26-27

b. God's displeasure is seen in His **promise of the judgment of exile** 5:26-

27

God promises to send them beyond Damascus which the people in Amos' day would have understood to mean Assyria. Even the false gods from Mesopotamia will not prevent God from executing His judgment of exile upon Israel. God is not only displeased with their worship but He promises the ultimate covenant curse of exile as His judgment against them.

Trans. We see the same thing in the second oracle as well.

2. When I measure the health of my relationship with God by the externals of my material circumstances God is not pleased. 6:4-11,14

a. God's displeasure is seen in His **words of condemnation**. 6:4-6

Amos in these verses describes the luxury lifestyle of the wealthy elite. This wealthy

class was enjoying the lifestyle that traditionally had been associated with royalty. The poor would have been glad to have a bed of any kind but the rich had beds decorated with ivory (6:4a). Stretched out on their couches conveys not merely the idea of comfort or relaxation but the notion of laziness or drunkenness or both (6:4b). Their choice of menu reflected the finest of dining as they enjoyed lamb and veal while eating meat was a rarity for most in Israel (6:4). "The general population lived on wheat and barley and whatever fruits and vegetables were at hand, and if they had meat at all, reserved it for the times of high celebration ..." (Hubbard 2009, 204)

Trans. Not only do we see God's displeasure in His words of condemnation but...

b. God's displeasure is seen in His **promise of the judgment of exile**. 6:7-11,14

God's promised judgment for Israel would be tailor made (6:7), certain (6:8) and thorough (6:9-11) and it climaxed with the promise of exile (6:14). Once again, the ultimate covenant curse of exile would be enacted as Israel would be expelled from their land, thereby demonstrating God's displeasure.

Trans. Why was God so disillusioned with Israel? Why was God so passionately disillusioned with their worship? Why was He so unimpressed with their prosperity both economically and politically?

It's important that we pause to clarify something that is crucial. God was not opposed to sacrifices, offerings, festivals, celebrations and music. It was after all His idea. It was He who gave the instructions to Israel. God wasn't opposed to the rituals of Israel's worship any more than He is opposed to you reading through your Bible in a year; or to your regular attendance here at the meetings of the church.

And neither was God opposed to Israel's material gain and wealth per se. After all, it was He who promised in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 "you obey me and I will bless you." Economically, I will multiply your herds and your crops. Politically I will bless you. You will be the head and not the tail." God was not opposed to their wealth in and of itself any more than He's opposed to us having a place to live.

So why is it then that God was so disillusioned with Israel? Why was He so put off by their worship? Why was He so unimpressed with their prosperity?

It's because Israel was mesmerized by the externals. They were addicted to the externals of ritual. They were intoxicated by numbers in terms of the dollars and cents of their bottom line, and the numbers of their square footage of real estate. Israel was concerned only with the externals but God was looking for something more. And God has always been looking for something more ... and that something more is our heart. Because from God's perspective...

II. The health of my relationship with God is to be measured by my heart of devotion. 5:24-25; 6:12

Trans. We see the importance of the heart highlighted twice over in our passage. In both oracles we see that God is concerned with the heart. We see this in 5:24 and again in 6:12. And here we are reminded that:

A. We need to have a heart of devotion that is concerned with the things that concern the heart of God. 5:24-25; 6:12

As we have observed Israel was concerned with the number of the feasts, the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, the peace offerings, the fattened animals, the quality of the songs, the performance of their harps. In contrast, the LORD was concerned with what was behind all of those things. Israel was concerned with the things you could see. God was concerned with what you couldn't see. Israel was concerned with the externals; the LORD was concerned with the internal. Israel was concerned with the surface of the matter. The LORD was concerned with the "heart" of the matter. The bottom line is that for the follower of the Lord, a heart of devotion needs to be concerned with the things that concern the heart of God.

Matters of the heart from the Lord's perspective are here described in 5:24 in terms of justice and righteousness. Israel was concerned about the *abundance* of their sacrifices, their offerings, their festival celebrations whereas God says He is passionate about the *abundance* of justice and righteousness. He here describes this idea of abundance in terms of "justice rolling down like waters" and "righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24).

Now hold that thought. Remember these two things - justice and righteousness. Come over now to 6:12. Two rather strange questions are asked in 6:12a. "Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen?" The anticipated answer is "of course not." It would be foolish to run horses on the rocks because of how it would hurt their feet and it would be silly to try to plough the rocks with oxen. You would destroy your equipment and injure your animals. That would be foolish.

The Lord's point is that it likewise was foolish for Israel to pervert righteousness and justice. As far as Israel was concerned, justice was to be avoided like poison. Doing things in the right way was as bitter as wormwood; a bitter medicine used for such things as expelling parasites from one's intestines.

This emphasis on justice and righteousness is a reference to a problem that was present in Israel in Amos' day and it's an issue that permeates the book of Amos. It is the problem of social injustice.

The matter of social justice is a major theme throughout the Scriptures because it portrays the heart of God. God is concerned for the poor, the disenfranchised, those on the peripheral, those without a voice, the widow, the orphan, the alien. We see the emphasis

of God's concern for these matters of social justice in God's provisions for the poor, the widows, orphans and aliens in the OT law. We see social justice celebrated in the psalms and it's a major theme throughout the prophetic books. The Lord Jesus modeled His concern for the poor, the vulnerable and those who society had thrown to the curb. These matters are a concern to the Lord and it is to be a concern for us as the church as well. It's to be a concern for us because it's a concern to the heart of God.

The problem in the days of Amos is that God's people were pretending to be authentic in their worship of God while violating the Law and the fundamental dignity of their fellow Israelites. The powerful, the elite, the rich, those who were part of the wealthy upper middle-class were consistently taking advantage of the vulnerable, the poor and those who didn't have a voice. The Law was being violated as exorbitant interest rates were levied against those who had to borrow. Judges and arbiters were being bribed with money and wine so that the people were deprived of a fair hearing when their matters came before the courts.

Sunday through Friday the wealthy, the powerful, took advantage of their fellow man but on the Sabbath, they put on their best clothes, made sure everything externally, everything on the outside was just so ... as they came to worship Yahweh. They failed to perceive that genuine worship of the LORD was linked with genuine treatment of others. They failed to perceive that genuine worship was not a matter of external ritualistic obligation but rather it was a matter of the heart. While they were religious and meticulous in the sacrifices and offerings they brought to God, they were careless and ignored the thing that mattered most - a true heart of devotion.

They built their wealth on the backs of the poor, the disenfranchised, the people without a voice. For them justice was to be avoided like poison and doing things righteously was viewed as bitter. Because when you're committed to justice and righteousness you can't use fake scales and false bushels. You can't contract to do a job for \$6000 and then show up with an invoice for \$10,000 for no good reason. But that's what Israel did. And they ignored what mattered most - a heart of devotion; a heart that was moved by the things that move the heart of God. They violated God's concern for social justice in the interests of self-promotion and selfish gain.

Trans. Israel was shocked when Amos announced that God was not pleased with them. They were in disbelief to learn that God was not impressed with their worship and their material gain. They were jolted and shocked because they needed to learn what we need to be reminded of this morning as well. We too need to be reminded that: **The health of my relationship with God is not measured by the externals of life but by my heart of devotion.**

Conclusion

Well how does this reality impact us this morning? We know a healthy relationship with God is important but how would we know if we had one? How do you measure that? And if we had one, how do you keep it? How do you maintain it?

Our passage reminds us this morning of the importance of the heart; the control center of my life. The place where my relationship with God is forged, strengthened and nurtured.

Gordon MacDonald in his book "Ordering Your Private World" tells the story of a close friend who was an officer aboard a United States Navy nuclear submarine. His friend relayed the story of how "one day while the sub was on duty in the Mediterranean, many ships were passing overhead on the surface and the submarine was having to make a large number of violent maneuvers to avoid possible collisions."

"In the absence of the captain," MacDonald's "friend was duty officer, in charge of giving the commands by which the submarine was positioned at each moment. Because there was such a sudden and unusual amount of movement, the captain, who had been in his own quarters, suddenly appeared on the bridge, the control center for the submarine asking, "Is everything all right?" "Yes, sir!" was the friend's reply. The captain took a quick look around and then started back out through the hatch to leave the bridge. As he disappeared he said, "It looks all right to me too." (MacDonald 1984, 20)

When the commander appeared on the bridge to assure himself that everything was in order, it was. And when things were in order there, the submarine was secure no matter what the external circumstances.

MacDonald states that biblical writers believed in the principle of the bridge too. What navy language calls the "bridge", the control center, the Bible calls the "heart"; the control center of your life and your relationship with God.

So, our question this morning is "How's your heart?" Because the overarching challenge is that we keep our heart. That we nurture our heart. That we maintain the vibrancy of our heart of devotion. A wise father once said to his son, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows out of it." Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

The question that begs to be answered is "How do we guard our heart?" I want to suggest two things.

We guard our heart by engaging in a right kind of thinking. We engage in a right kind of thinking this morning by reminding ourselves that **the measure of determining the health of my relationship with God is not by the externals of life but by the vibrancy of my heart's devotion.** We need to let that truth permeate our minds this week because that way of thinking does not come naturally to us. It's counter-intuitive.

We like our checklists. As people we are given to the externals because they're tangible. We can measure them. We can see them. We can feel them. And while those externals can all be good, they are to be driven by a heart of devotion; by a heart that is in sync with the heart of God.

Trans. We guard our hearts by engaging in a right kind of thinking. But not only that...

We guard our heart by engaging in a right kind of doing. There are no surprises here and there is no quick fix. The right kind of doing involves us engaging in the spiritual disciplines that God's word challenges us to. It includes our worship, our time in the Word, our time in prayer, our time in solitude, corporately meeting with God's people. It involves each of these things among others. These are all things that God calls us to.

But here is the challenge as I see it. The very things we do to nurture our heart are the very things we can be tempted in our carnal, fleshly moments to appeal to in order to convince ourselves that we are doing well. And so, we live with that tension.

Author Tim Keller in speaking about living for the Lord says we need to be motivated to do it "not merely by compulsion out of a sense of duty but by an inner desire out of a sense of his beauty." (Keller 2015, 195) We need to do it "not merely by compulsion out of a sense of duty"; (that speaks to the externals) but by an inner desire out of a sense of His beauty; (that speaks to our heart). As we nurture our heart that's how we strengthen our inner desire that flows from a sense of His beauty.

So, the challenge for us this morning is "Guard your heart" because if we get that right the other things in life will be right too. Get that wrong and it ultimately doesn't much matter what else you get right. Guard your heart so that you don't experience the unwelcome discovery that **"what seems so right can be so wrong."** Guard your heart because:

"The health of my relationship with God isn't measured by the externals but by my heart of devotion!"

Summary Of Key Steps Involved In Going From Prophetic Text To Sermon As Illustrated In Amos 5:18-6:14

1. Set the Minor prophetic book within the context of the Old Testament.

We have identified Amos as an eighth century prophet prophesying to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II 786-746 B.C. As an eighth century prophet he is one of the earliest writing prophets and is prophesying well in advance of the Assyrian captivity.

2. Set the prophetic passage within the context of the prophetic book.

Having established an outline of the book of Amos we are then able to place our preaching passage within a section of the book featuring a series of judgment of messages. Our preaching passage contains the messages of woe.

3. Ensure that the passage is a literary unit.

The preaching passage comprises a literary unit inasmuch as it is linked together by the pronouncement of two major woe oracles.

4. Identify clues that confirm if the passage is a judgment or salvation oracle.

It is clear that the passage is a judgment oracle because of the pronouncements of woe upon the nation of Israel. Also, the main elements of a judgment speech are present within each oracle, namely the messenger formula, reason for judgment and Yahweh's declaration of action.

5. Identify the clues that confirm the particular genres and literary forms that are found within the passage. Evaluate how these particulars should impact the construction and delivery of the sermon.

The presence of the word "woe" is indicative that a literary form of a woe oracle is being employed by the prophet. The sermon references that a message of woe from the LORD strikes a sense of awe, fear and being overwhelmed; emotions which are readily captured just by reading the text.

6. Identify the historical, cultural and political context of the original audience and how these elements impact the particular preaching passage.

The historical, cultural and political context plays an important role in unwrapping the message of this selected preaching text. The economic prosperity of the days of Jeroboam II made possible by a weakened Assyria features prominently in both oracles. The extravagant lifestyle of the wealthy elite is a dominant feature in the second oracle. Understanding how this prosperity came about resulting in a new upper middle class that now enjoyed luxury that heretofore was reserved for royalty helps underscore the realities Amos addressed.

Securing their wealth even at the cost of engaging in a variety of social injustices as they violated the dignity and value of the poor features prominently in both oracles.

Understanding how this reality came to be helps the listener to gain a clear understanding of why the LORD is offended by the actions of His people and why He pronounces these stern messages of judgment upon them.

7. Identify any historical events or allusions that are present within the passage that will need to be understood and explained in order to capture the meaning of the passage.

Examine what the reference to the wilderness years in 5:25 conveys regarding how Israel worshiped the Lord? Also, it is important to explore the meaning of 6:13 and the places of Lo-debar and Karnaim.

8. Identify the key exegetical and interpretive issues in the passage that need to be studied in order to gain an understanding of the passage.

Some of the key items identified in this passage include the following. What is the Day of the LORD and how did Amos' audience understand this term? Secondly, why does the Lord hate the very sacrifices and rituals that He commanded His people to bring to Him? Thirdly, linking justice and righteousness to the problem of the social injustices of the day is an important element to both passages. Fourthly, identifying the images of 5:26 and the role that they play in the judgment of exile needs to be explored in the preacher's studying of this passage. Fifthly, what is the lesson to be learned from the cities of Calneh and Hamath of 6:2-3? Sixthly, interact with why it is significant that the penalty judgment of exile is present in both oracles. Explain that exile was the ultimate covenant judgment the Lord could bring against His people and this penalty reflects the seriousness with which the Lord regarded these covenant violations. Seventhly, the rhetorical questions of 6:12 underscores the foolishness of Israel to disregard the importance of justice and righteousness in administering their social affairs. Eighthly, understanding the significance of Lo-debar and Karnaim and the play on words that is present in 6:13 is also important.

9. Be sensitive to the employment of poetry and prose in the passage.

For example, observe the poetry of 5:21-24. Notice the repetition reflected in the parallelism which builds to the crescendo of what the Lord desires; namely, justice and righteousness. Similarly, in 6:12 the rhetorical questions in 12a lead up to the powerful metaphors underscoring their commitment to injustice.

10. Begin the process of constructing your sermon from the prophetic passage in the manner that you would construct your message from other parts of the Bible including the following major elements:

- A. Establish an exegetical outline and exegetical idea of the passage.
- B. Establish a homiletical outline and homiletical idea for the passage.

11. Explore ways and opportunities to apply the message of the prophetic text to a twenty-first century audience beginning with surfacing a need in your introduction and reinforcing your preaching idea in your conclusion.

What does the passage contribute to a greater understanding of God and His people? Be sensitive of who your audience is and how the message of the prophet relates to them. For example, consider how the message of the prophet applies corporately to the church, to an individual follower of Jesus or to society as a whole.

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CHAPTER FIVE

PROJECT EVALUATION AND REFLECTIONS

This chapter will provide an evaluation of the seminar as detailed in chapter four. The means of evaluating the seminar will be based on responses from the participants who attended the seminar as well as my own personal reflections of the teaching event. Comments will be made concerning the strengths of the seminar curriculum and possible ways for further improving it.

The Teaching Event

The seminar was presented on Tuesday, November 28, 2017 to a group of six pastors who gathered at Westmount Bible Chapel in Peterborough, Ontario. Four out of the six pastors had been in ministry ranging from two through five years and the remaining two had served for twelve and thirty years respectively. A letter of invitation was sent to each participant. Additionally, a manuscript of the sample sermon from Amos along with the exegetical and homiletical outline was also included with the encouragement for each one to read these documents prior to attending. The announced plan was to begin the seminar at 9:30 a.m. with a commitment to conclude by 3:00 p.m. I thought that this timeline would provide plenty of margin which ended up being necessary because of some unanticipated circumstances. Two participants were late in arriving due to traffic challenges. Additionally, plumbing difficulties at the church facility requiring professional maintenance necessitated a further delay due to noise considerations. As a result of these two factors the seminar began at 10:15 a.m. In addition to the coffee and drinks made available for the morning and afternoon breaks lunch was also provided at noon. These social times provided an opportunity for further

fellowship in addition to the interaction experienced during the seminar.

The presenter gave a brief introduction to the seminar. The participants then introduced themselves and shared if they had either preached a sermon from the Minor Prophets or if they had heard one preached in their church within the last year. Two out of the six had preached at least one sermon but the other four acknowledged that they had not preached from the prophetic books for some time. A couple of the others had heard a sermon from the prophets in the last year but all were in agreement that sermons from the prophetic books were infrequent.

Since a major focus in the seminar relates to the importance of genre, a genre questionnaire was administered before and after the seminar to determine the participants' familiarity with key elements of prophetic genre. The pre-seminar questionnaire was administered immediately following the introductions.

The first two sessions of the seminar were taught before lunch, namely, "The Historical and Cultural Context of Amos" and "The Spiritual Issues Confronting God's People in Amos." After forty-five minutes for lunch the seminar reconvened for the third session dealing with "The Literary Genres of the Bible and Key Elements of Prophetic Genre." As anticipated, this session was the longest of the teaching sessions and an extra ten minutes was spent on this part of the seminar. As a result of time constraints, session four, "Exegetical and Hermeneutical Considerations in Preaching the Prophets", was not dealt with as thoroughly. I decided to highlight the key parts of this session so the majority of our time was spent on how to apply the Minor Prophets and reviewing the major steps involved in compiling a sermon from the prophets.

Tools For Evaluating The Effectiveness Of The Seminar

Feedback from the participants regarding the effectiveness of the seminar was derived by three means. The pre-and post-genre questionnaire was designed to gauge the participants on their awareness of genre elements coming into the seminar and if an increase in knowledge was gained on these matters by the conclusion of seminar.¹ Secondly, the participants completed an objective questionnaire following the seminar in which they indicated their assessment of its effectiveness on a number of measures. Thirdly, each participant agreed to be interviewed following the seminar. These interview questions provided them the opportunity to expand on their questionnaire answers or to provide additional comments on the seminar. Three options for completing the interview questions included being interviewed immediately after the seminar, agreeing to a follow-up telephone interview or completing the interview questions in written format. Time factors resulted in four of the pastors opting for the telephone interview; one was interviewed immediately following the seminar and the remaining person completed the interview questions by email. Most interviews were conducted by telephone the following day and all interview responses were received within the week.²

Evaluation Feedback Summarized

The pre-seminar and post-seminar prophetic genre questionnaire revealed that while the participants possessed a limited awareness of the elements of prophetic genre prior to the seminar the awareness of these matters greatly increased overall by the

¹ A summary of the pre-seminar and post-seminar genre questionnaire results are provided in Appendix A Supplement 5.4.

² Copies of the evaluation forms are included in Appendix A as Supplement 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. Also, in order to encourage full transparency and honest feedback, the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and evaluation form anonymously.

conclusion of the seminar. The percentage of increased awareness on the genre questions ranged from a +22.3% to 100%. There was just one question that yielded no change in score from the pre-seminar to the post-seminar questionnaire.

Encouraging results were received from the participants' responses to the questionnaire which was designed to assess the effectiveness of the seminar on a number of measures. All of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to follow the outline notes and the objectives were clearly communicated. Each of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the seminar imparted information that they were not familiar with prior to the seminar. All of the participants strongly agreed that the seminar provided information that would be helpful to any person preparing an expositional sermon from the Minor Prophets including experienced pastors like themselves. Five of the six pastors indicated that as a result of the seminar they are now more likely to preach a sermon or series of sermons from the Minor Prophets in the next year. (The other pastor in his interview indicated that their preaching calendar was already in place for 2018 but he felt he would be negligent if after the seminar he did not preach from the Minor Prophets in 2019.) Each participant either agreed or strongly agreed that they now had more confidence in preaching from the Minor Prophets as a result of the seminar.

From the post-seminar interviews conducted with the participants numerous insights were conveyed and a number of themes emerged. The participants conveyed an appreciation for how the seminar served to help them unlock the Minor Prophets. In the words of one participant, "You broke down the wall of dauntingness in approaching some of these Minor Prophets." While the seminar never gave the impression that preaching

from this portion of the Old Testament was going to be easy the seminar demonstrated that the prophetic books are not as "mysterious as it appears at first" and "you gave us the tools to get at it."

The majority of the participants thought the pre-and-post-seminar genre questionnaire was helpful in underscoring the importance of genre in the exegetical process of biblical study in general and studying the Minor Prophets in particular. The lower scores achieved by most on the pre-seminar questionnaire reflected a lack of awareness of the specific genre elements pertaining to the prophetic books. On the other hand, the post-seminar results reflected an increased knowledge of key concepts pertaining to the prophetic genre and encouraged the participants that they had indeed learned something. From an instructor standpoint, it was evident that the participants' interest was piqued because they sensed the importance of prophetic genre in a heightened way.

Most affirmed that the genre focus of session three served as a key way to unlock the prophetic text. Several expressed that they were now equipped to look for the key components of a judgment speech or a salvation speech and they felt that they now possessed some key tools for examining the text. One participant in commenting on the importance of the genre session said, "It ignited a flame in me in realizing that there's more here and it serves to light a flame in us preachers who want to engage this text."

An appreciation was expressed for each component of the seminar. One expressed how they appreciated the flow; how that one session led to the next. Everyone expressed that no part of the seminar was redundant or unnecessary. Some indicated that they were familiar with the importance of genre dating back to their seminary days,

however they were challenged that they were not paying enough attention to it in their current biblical study and sermon preparation. Another expressed that if they had come into the seminar with a greater knowledge of the prophets and a familiarity with preaching from the Minor Prophets they might have found some things redundant but such was not the case.

The suggestions for how to apply the Minor Prophets in sermons for today's audience was well received. The participants expressed that this element of application was a major challenge for them. One said, "The section on application on how we can apply these things to our culture today was very helpful." Another stated, "The last section on application of themes from the Minor Prophets for today was very helpful."

The summary checklist highlighting important steps in going from exegesis through to sermon composition was perceived to be helpful. Several indicated that the seminar gave them a helpful resource which they will use the next time they are preaching from the prophetic books and that this summary of the key steps will guide them in their preparation.

The emphasis on the relevancy of the prophetic books for preaching today was appreciated by many of the participants. One participant stated that the seminar illustrated "the contemporary relevance of preaching the Minor Prophets in terms of the enduring real spiritual needs that we have." Another expressed that prior to the seminar his default would be to go to Jesus and not think about the Minor Prophets when dealing with such matters as social justice, hypocritical worship and materialism. However, "this seminar draws me back to consider these texts that would be very unfamiliar to people."

Each of the participants expressed that as a result of the seminar they now felt an

increased confidence in preaching from the Minor Prophets which now increased the likelihood of them preaching from these books in the next year. The following sentiment expressed by one participant captured a shared viewpoint when he said, "I've been punting the idea that I need to preach from the Old Testament. I've shared with the elders I need to do something from the Old Testament. We're always in the New Testament but I just haven't because a lot of these things I don't feel that I know what I'm doing. But I would feel more comfortable now."

Personal Reflection And Evaluation

I was very pleased with how the seminar unfolded. It was evident during the sessions as well as from comments received on the breaks and over lunch that the material was being well received.

Of the four sessions comprising the seminar, I was most concerned that the first session focusing on the historical and cultural context of the prophet might seem the most redundant. I knew that each of the participants understood the importance of the historical grammatical element in studying the Bible so my hunch was that they might think this emphasis to be unnecessary since it was a "given." However, such was not the case. In the interview questions, each participant affirmed that each of the sessions were necessary or helpful and some specifically highlighted how knowing the historical background paved the way for deriving key insights from the book of Amos.

Session three which addressed the distinctive elements of the literary genre found in prophetic literature was the most intense. Fifty minutes is really not sufficient to teach through the material especially when questions and discussions are encouraged. I was aware of this heading into the seminar. While the genre session was extremely well

received it was also observed that additional time for further interaction would have enhanced the session even more. However, the reality of the time constraints was understood by everyone. One possible way to address this need would be to increase the allotted time for each session to sixty or even seventy-five minutes. Additionally, if this material was going to be incorporated into a homiletics curriculum then it would be advisable to provide at least two teaching periods for this subject.

How to apply the Minor Prophets in sermons today was acknowledged by everyone as being of great importance. Several expressed that the suggested application themes highlighted in the seminar were very helpful. One participant expressed that even more time devoted to the subject of application would have been good. While time constraints will always be a reality when delivering this material in a seminar format extending the length of each session could help address this matter.

An important discussion which surfaced throughout the seminar related to the crafting of the sermon and the inclusion of background material. Specifically, the concern related to how much of one's study material should make it into the sermon. This discussion was most apparent in the first session concerning the historical and cultural context of Amos and in session three dealing with the genre considerations. Represented in the small group of six participants were those who embraced an exegetical approach to preaching and those who followed the Big-Idea expositional approach. Lively discussion ensued at both of these junctures of the seminar. Those embracing an exegetical approach gravitated to including more background detail into their sermons. The others were of the mindset that the background information needed to inform the preacher in his study and advocated incorporating only as much as was

necessary in order to make the sermon flow and to demonstrate the legitimacy of the point being communicated. Given the discussion that resulted in this small test group it would be advisable for the presenter to incorporate time to interact on this matter in each of these sessions. While this seminar is designed for those who have had an introductory course in expositional preaching this teaching event demonstrated that even within a small group such as this one, varied perspectives will be present among the participants and these practical discussions are helpful.

The inclusion of the sample sermon along with the exegetical and homiletical outline was very beneficial. Additionally, sending these documents in advance of the seminar to each participant so they could be familiar with the material was advantageous. Sending the documents prior to the seminar was not my initial plan but due to my concern of time constraints for the last session I thought it might be helpful. It ended up being even more helpful than I anticipated. As a result, I would recommend that this practice be done whenever possible when presenting this seminar. It gave the participants a tangible demonstration of the end-product the seminar is designed to help them produce. The participants referenced the sermon manuscript and the outlines numerous times throughout the seminar.

Conclusion

In summary, the feedback from the participants who attended this seminar affirmed that preaching from the Minor Prophets is a neglected area of preaching today. The evaluative results also confirmed that there is a need for a resource to help guide preachers through the process of compiling expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets. Additionally, the emphasis on the importance of being sensitive to the

elements of prophetic genre is key to helping unlock the biblical text and crafting genre sensitive sermons from the Minor Prophets. The seminar results also confirmed that preachers when armed with a resource designed to help them compile sermons from the Minor Prophets will sense an increased confidence in approaching the biblical text. Additionally, they will also be more likely to preach from this neglected part of the Scriptures in the future. If this proposed curriculum can help in some measure advance an increased likelihood of sermons being preached from the Minor Prophets then this presenter will be pleased to have been a small part of accomplishing this goal for the glory of God.

Solo Deo Gloria!

APPENDIX A

SUPPLEMENT 5.1 – SEMINAR EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Place a number beside each statement below that reflects your opinion.

1 Strongly Disagree; 2 Disagree; 3 Neutral; 4 Agree; 5 Strongly Agree

1. I was able to follow the outline notes for each seminar session. _____
2. The objectives for each session were clearly communicated. _____
3. Information was conveyed in the seminar that I was not familiar with prior to attending. _____
4. The seminar provides information that will be helpful for a person preparing to preach expositional sermons from the Minor Prophets. _____
5. There is something that I learned in this seminar that I will use when I prepare an expositional sermon from the Minor Prophets. _____
6. After taking this seminar I am more likely to preach an expositional sermon from the Minor Prophets in the next year. _____
7. After taking this seminar I am more likely to preach an expositional series from the Minor Prophets in the next year. _____
8. After taking this seminar I feel I will have more confidence in preaching an expositional sermon from the Minor Prophets. _____

SUPPLEMENT 5.2 – SEMINAR GENRE QUESTIONNAIRE

(To be administered before and after the seminar)

1. What is the most dominant literary genre found in the Bible?
2. What is the second most dominant literary genre found in the Bible?
3. Name the two dominant types of speech or oracles found in the prophetic books.
 - a.
 - b.
4. What is the name of the literary form found in the prophetic books that depicts God taking His people to court?
5. Name the dominant literary genre employed by the writing prophets.
6. What is the name of the oracle that is directed against nations?
7. What is the name of the oracle that conveys intense judgment and that frequently occurs in clusters in the prophetic books?
8. In literature terms, a stand-alone section of writing that conveys a message of the author is referred to as what?
9. What is the literary form the prophets use to convey deep mourning and grief?
10. What is the term for a group of texts characterized by distinct literary features which provides clues to the reader as to how they are to be read?
11. What is the term for literary communication that is closer to ordinary speech than poetry and is arranged by paragraphs rather than by lines and stanzas.
12. The phrase "Thus says the LORD" as found in prophetic speech is also known by what other description?

SUPPLEMENT 5.3 – POST-SEMINAR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What aspect(s) of the seminar did you find most helpful?
2. What aspect(s) of the seminar did you find least helpful?
3. What suggestions would you make to increase the effectiveness of the seminar?
4. After taking the seminar do you feel you would have more confidence or less confidence in preaching an expositional sermon from the Minor Prophets? Why?
5. What impact will this seminar have on you in giving greater consideration to preaching from the Minor Prophets?
6. Do you have any further thoughts on the seminar?

SUPPLEMENT 5.4 – GENRE QUESTIONNAIRE: PRE/POST-SEMINAR RESULTS

1. What is the most dominant literary genre found in the Bible?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
4/6	66.7	6	100	+22.3%

2. What is the second most dominant literary genre found in the Bible?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	4/6	66.7	+66.7%

3. Name the two dominant types of speech or oracles found in the prophetic books.
a.

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
2/6	33.3	5/6	83.3	+50%

b.

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
1/6	16.7	5/6	83.3	+66.6%

4. What is the name of the literary form found in the prophetic books that depicts God taking His people to court?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	3/6	3	50%

5. Name the dominant literary genre employed by the writing prophets.

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	4/6	66.7	+66.7%

6. What is the name of the oracle that is directed against nations?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	3/6	50	+50%

7. What is the name of the oracle that conveys intense judgment and that frequently occurs in clusters in the prophetic books?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	6/6	100	+100%

8. In literature terms, a stand-alone section of writing that conveys a message of the author is referred to as what?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	0/6	0	0

9. What is the literary form the prophets use to convey deep mourning and grief?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
4/6	66.7	6/6	100	+22.3%

10. What is the term for a group of texts characterized by distinct literary features which provides clues to the reader as to how they are to be read?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	4/6	66.7	+66.7%

11. What is the term for literary communication that is closer to ordinary speech than poetry and is arranged by paragraphs rather than by lines and stanzas.

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
3/6	50	5/6	83.3	+33.3%

12. The phrase "Thus says the LORD" as found in prophetic speech is also known by what other description?

Pre-Seminar	Percent	Post-Seminar	Percent	Variance
0/6	0	5/6	83.3	+83.3%

APPENDIX B

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

- I. Introduction 1:1-2**
 - A. The Superscription of Amos 1:1
 - B. The Theme of Amos 1:2
- II. Eight Oracles of Judgment: The Strategy of Amos' Ministry 1:3-2:16**
 - A. An Oracle of Judgment Against Damascus 1:3-5
 - B. An Oracle of Judgment Against Gaza 1:6-8
 - C. An Oracle of Judgment Against Tyre 1:9-10
 - D. An Oracle of Judgment Against Edom 1:11-12
 - E. An Oracle of Judgment Against Ammon 1:13-15
 - F. An Oracle of Judgment Against Moab 2:1-3
 - G. An Oracle of Judgment Against Judah 2:4-5
 - H. An Oracle of Judgment Against Israel 2:6-16
- III. Five Messages of Judgment Against Israel 3:1-6:14**
 - A. A Sermon Announcing Israel's Destruction 3:1-15
 - B. A Sermon Announcing Israel's Sinfulness 4:1-13
 - C. A Sermon Announcing Israel's Funeral 5:1-17
 - D. A Pronouncement of Woe Because of Israel's Hypocritical Worship 5:18-27
 - E. A Pronouncement of Woe Because of Israel's Materialistic Greed and False Sense of Security 6:1-14
- IV. Five Visions of Judgment Against Israel and Amos' Exchange with Amaziah the Priest 7:1-9:10**
 - A. The Vision of Locusts 7:1-3
 - B. The Vision of Fire 7:4-6
 - C. The Vision of the Plumb Line or The Vision of Tin 7:7-9
 - D. The Encounter (Amos's Confrontation with Amaziah the Priest at Bethel) 7:10-17
 - E. The Vision of the Summer Fruit 8:1-14
 - F. The Vision Depicting Judgment at the Worship Center 9:1-10
- V. A Better Day Is Coming: The Promise of Restoration and Blessing 9:11-15**

APPENDIX C

MAP OF BIBLE LANDS TODAY



This map is found in The Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions.¹

¹ Marsha A. Ellis Smith, ed., *Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 107.

APPENDIX D

COMPARISON OF ISRAEL BEFORE AND AFTER KING JEROBOAM II



This comparison of Israel's expansion under the leadership of King Jeroboam II can be viewed online at the address below.¹

¹ https://www.google.ca/search?q=map+of+israel+during+jeroboam+ii&tbm=isch&imgil=08kSWI2BrqrjuM%253A%253BCRY3nbXcpykftM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.biblehistory.com%25252Fmaps%25252Fbooks.php&source=iu&pf=m&fir=08kSWI2BrqrjuM%253A%252CCR Y3nbXcpykftM%252C_&usg=__RisIbbSt4MkkZVtprKzS_xFq3ec%3D&ved=0ahUKEwjJ_JXz6ejVAhUn1oMKHVPEA9MQyjcIOw&ei=FBWbWeOiFKesjwTTiI-YDQ&biw=1366&bih=662#imgrc=6Gt3HY-TfAJt5M: (Accessed August 21, 1017).

APPENDIX E

EXPANSION OF ISRAEL UNDER KING JEROBOAM II

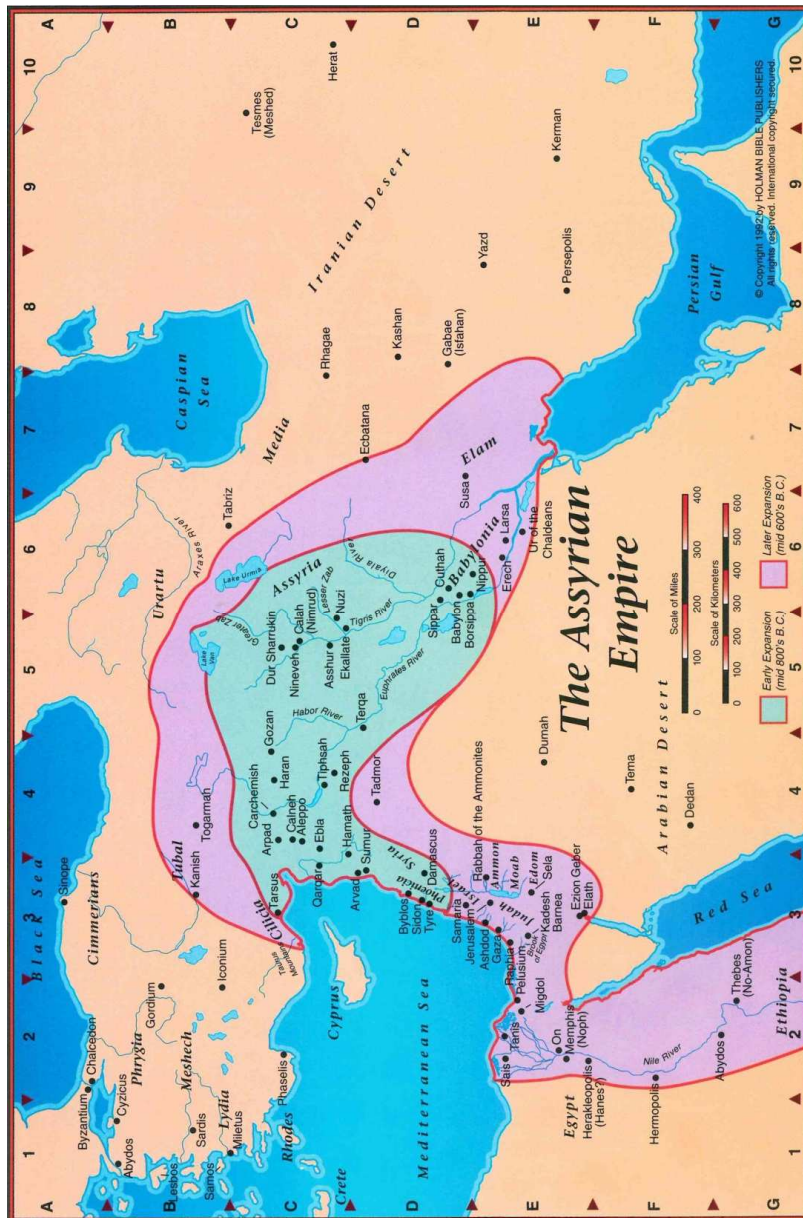


The online source for this map is included below.¹

¹ https://www.google.ca/search?q=map+of+israel+during+jeroboam+ii&tbm=isch&imgil=08kSWI2BrqrjuM%253A%253BCRY3nbXcpykftM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.biblehistory.com%25252Fmaps%25252Fbooks.php&source=iu&pf=m&fir=08kSWI2BrqrjuM%253A%252CCR Y3nbXcpykftM%252C_&usg=__RisIbbSt4MkkZVtprKzS_xFq3ec%3D&ved=0ahUKEwjJ_JXz6ejVAhUn1oMKHVPEA9MQyjcIOw&ei=FBWbWeOiFKesjwTTiYDQ&biw=1366&bih=662#imgrc=08kSWI2BrqrjuM: (Accessed August 21, 1017).

APPENDIX F

MAP OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

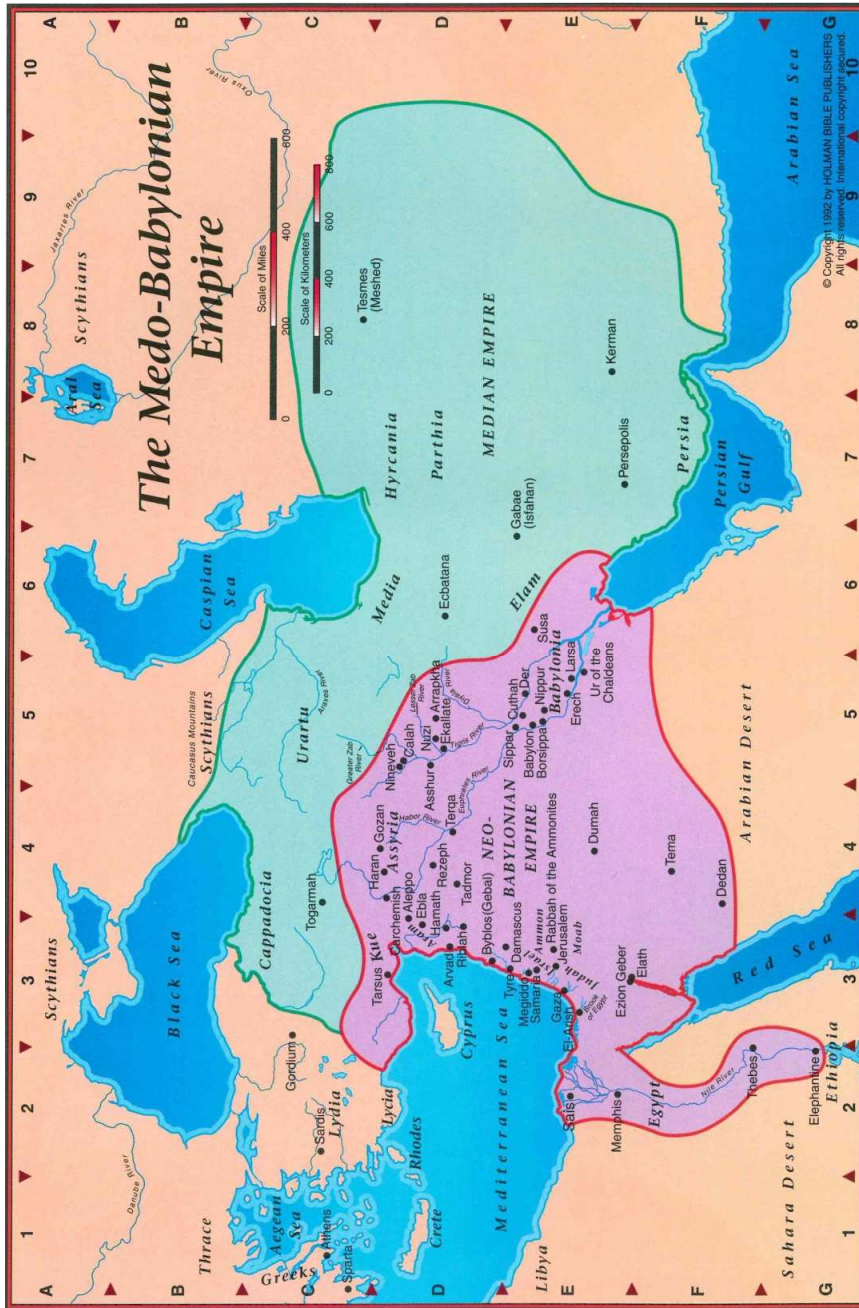


This map is derived from The Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions.¹

¹ Marsha A. Ellis Smith, ed., *Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 113.

APPENDIX G

MAP OF THE MEDO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

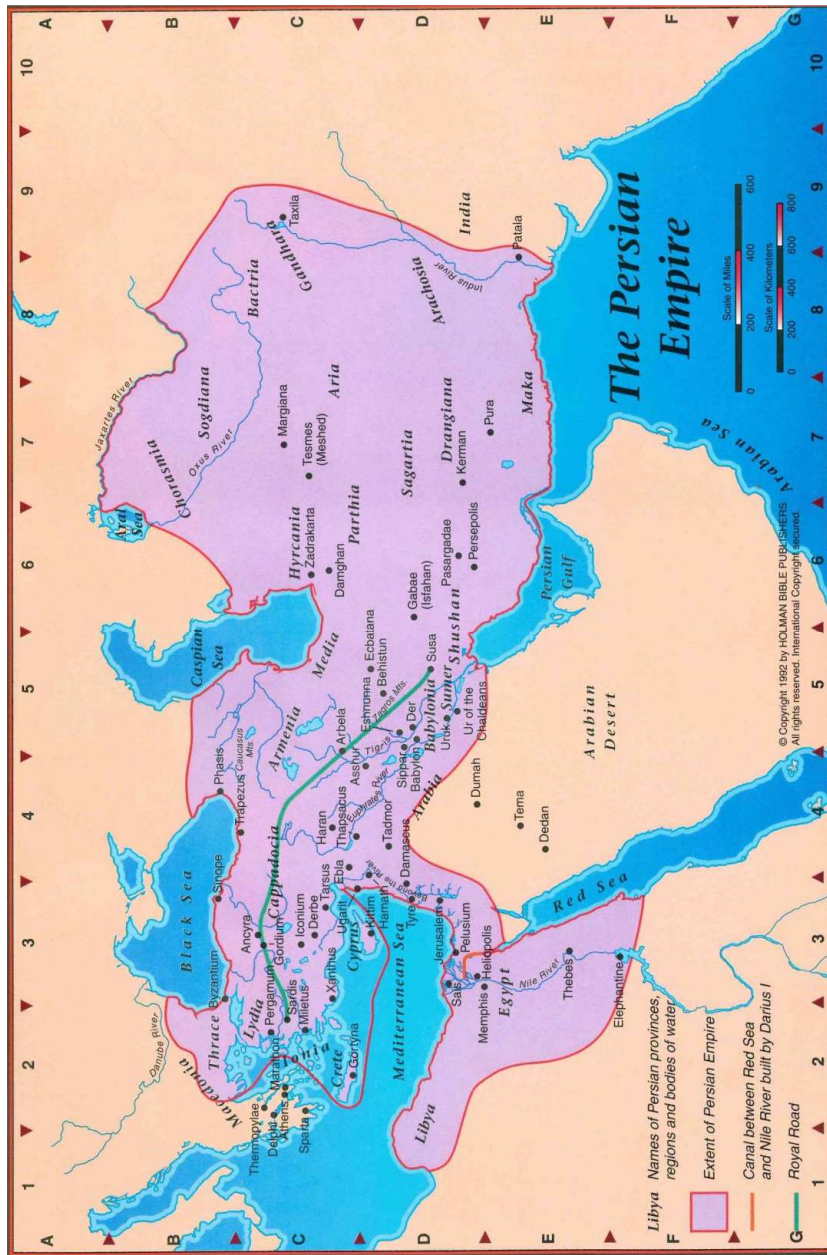


This map is found in The Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions.¹

¹ Marsha A. Ellis Smith, ed., *Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 121.

APPENDIX H

MAP OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE



This map is located in The Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions.¹

¹ Marsha A. Ellis Smith, ed., *Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps and Reconstructions*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 122.

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